



## **SUFFOLK SCENE**

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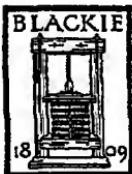
R. Schwabe

# SUFFOLK SCENE

*A Book of Description and Adventure*

BY

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Author of "Rough Shooting"



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To  
MY PARENTS  
in gratitude for an upbringing which made  
possible my early adventures

*My sincere thanks are due to Professor Schwabe, for permission to reproduce the drawings used as Frontispiece and Wrapper; and to Mr. Clive de Paula, who from the vicissitudes of a sunless and disheartening summer has managed to extract eleven photographs to the perfect satisfaction of us both.*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### PROLOGUE

#### SUFFOLK TO-DAY

SUFFOLK in distant days was nicknamed "Selig", a Saxon word meaning Blessed or Holy. A frivolous and irreverent posterity corrupted "Selig" into "Silly", and "Silly Suffolk" is now our label for all time. It is a most ignorant and unworthy reproach, for there is not an East Anglian born without a latent foxiness and guile which he conceals from the stranger beneath a mask of impenetrable shyness and apparent simplicity. And simple of heart you will find him, if he likes you; but should you offend him, he will remain crafty and suspicious to the end of your acquaintance. In this way there is a curious parallel of character between the inhabitants and the country itself, fashioned, I suppose, by generations of deep-rooted intimacy.

In aspect and outlook Suffolk seems content to amble along at least a century behind the rest of England. Because it has not been visited with the questionable comforts of modernity, it remains shy and unsophisticated. Not only are the people shy, but the spirit of the country itself is independent, capricious and elusive—if you don't treat it properly it will, like an

## SUFFOLK SCENE

unresponsive tortoise, retire to the seclusion of its own shell and escape you for ever. That slight animosity of Suffolk attracts the right people and repels the wrong ones.

It is a country for the individualist, for the explorer and the lover of loneliness. Most people who have merely passed through it have very little to say in its favour. The reason for this is simple: you can't judge Suffolk from a motor-car, because the main roads happen to have the dullest landscape in the county. Whether the roads have altered the look of the countryside, or whether its dullness is purely a coincidence (providential in many ways), the fact remains that Suffolk from the main road is decidedly uninteresting. The route from London to Norwich crosses the county by that extraordinary piece of country called Breckland, which at first sight seems nothing more than a dozen miles of dreary heath. As to the other main road, between Stratford St. Mary and Ipswich it shows the country at its worst—treeless, hedgeless and flat; between Ipswich and Saxmundham the improvement is regrettably slight; and it is only from Yoxford to Lowestoft that the weary traveller gets a glimpse of the real, untainted Suffolk, by which time he is probably in no condition to appreciate it. But once get away from these roads for a mile or so and the dullness, even on the stretch between Stratford and Ipswich, evaporates like a morning mist. This transformation is one of the strangest, pleasantest and most startling surprises in the whole county. Unfortunately, not many people bother to experience it. They are content to condemn Suffolk without a hearing, not realizing that it will never show itself to them unless they set

out to find it in the right and proper way, which is, in part, what I meant by its shyness.

You will have to look for the charm of the Suffolk countryside—it is a charm most carefully hidden. Perhaps this is because we have no downs or high hills from which you can survey the landscape at your leisure—there is just one, 450 feet high, a few miles south-west of Bury St. Edmunds, that I have vowed to make the goal of some future pilgrimage. When you can see farms and villages and woods spread out beneath you simply by sitting still and turning your head, then three-quarters of your exploration are already over. But you can't do that in Suffolk; you can never say for certain what is going to confront you round this bend in the lane or past that corner of the hedge, for the very reason that you can't see it. Suffolk is a disconcerting county, as full of surprises as a Christmas stocking, and I find this state of constant speculation one of its greatest delights. But don't think that we have no views at all; John Constable knew where to look for them, and he found in Suffolk some of the most beautiful in the country. And yet, because he knew that the coast did not suit his brush so well as the inland valleys, and because he never painted along that land which shelves down to the sea, there were others that even he did not find.

The views are all the more pleasing because they are unexpected. Everything about Suffolk is unexpected—views, valleys, villages, cottages, farms, the castles and abbeys that have made the county an antiquarians' Utopia. You never suspect their existence until you find them accidentally. An abbey, or what is left of it, may escape you in the guise of a battered

## SUFFOLK SCENE

cattle-shed, or it may leap at you from the middle of a cornfield, or show you but one coy, crumbled buttress from the protection of a thick wood. As to the castles, I can best show my meaning by telling you that I know one which has been converted into a railway-station.

Like the country itself, the buildings are quite irregular and illogical in their placing and character. Cottages and farmhouses, even churches, often seem to exist without any human contact at all, connected with the nearest road by an almost unrecognizable and wholly impassable cart-track. On a walk of a dozen miles you will find scores of them, desolate, untended, making their last long stand against decay; to-day they seem even farther from civilization than they were three hundred years ago, and rather than their beauty it is their stubbornness and their courage that will attract you.

Have they no link with the world? Apparently not, for the village to which they belong is probably a couple of miles away, undreamed of until you are in the midst of it. And the villages, too, are lonely—remote settlements in a remote land, with no prettiness about them, but a solid and unconventional beauty, an inward warmth distilled by the years and cloaked with an outward austerity. Popular villages are those known as picturesque; the virtues of the Suffolk villages still exist because they are as yet undiscovered by the world. In my heart I hope they never will be. "All men kill the thing they love," and they have succeeded in killing most of the villages of which they have grown over-fond.

There is little popular beauty in Suffolk or its

villages, yet some of these villages are quite flawless in their aged harmony—by harmony I mean anything but tidiness, for untidiness is one of their greatest charms. Stoke-by-Nayland, a favourite of Constable's, is the exception in this respect, for it is strangely uniform. Kerscy owes at least half its reputation to its position, being built up and down the sides of a stream, which flows unhampered through the middle of its only street. Earl Soham, which straggles between two small hills, has one of the finest rectories in the county and a number of clean, plain, simple, white cottages. These and half a dozen more are high up in the class called perfect. But I have a perfect village of my own finding, which, I pride myself, is quite unknown. It is Chelsworth, half-way between Kersey and Lavenham. It is very small, it straggles, its houses are set well apart, its pub is the back premises of a grocer's shop, it lies completely hidden in a little valley. Its cottages are irregular, very well kept and finely timbered. It borders a stream, a quiet, reedy stream, whose banks are lined with rich and gigantic trees. I can't tell you why I think it perfect. Perhaps it is because Chelsworth has been left to itself, because it is unmarred by discovery, because it epitomizes in a dozen cottages what Kersey and Stoke attempt with fifty.

The villages and all that goes with them I must leave to their proper places, and for the same reason I will only say of the churches that theirs is a magnificence which brooks no denial, not even from the main road traveller himself, who, wending his witless way across the county, will pass one or two that will take the wind out of his tyres and the sheen off his argument. But before I leave the buildings for the

present, there are some that I should like to mention here, for fear that I shall not again find such a convenient opportunity.

Firstly, the windmills. I think I would rather have a good old Suffolk windmill than any other building in the length and breadth of England. I love it for its homeliness, its simplicity, the very plainness that is the whole of its beauty. It is precarious, yet solid and comfortable; ungainly, yet smooth and graceful and perfectly attuned; a landmark, a survival, willing and reliable, yet doomed through the falseness of its fitful friend—the wind. The wind is temperamental, so now the sails of the mill stand idle while an engine throbs beneath them. The mill has just the human failings of the horse, who, because he cannot work fast enough, is discarded in favour of the bus, the lorry and the car. Yet the mill can *work* fast enough—it can work every bit as fast as the engine. The fault lies with the wind alone. More than the passing of the horse, the windjammer and a score of other things in these days which are a race against speed, I regret the disappearance of the windmill; but I am glad to say that there is in Suffolk a society for their preservation, and that there are still millers fond enough of the old order to stand by the superannuated devices of their forefathers.

There are two types of windmill, Post and Tower, and most of those in Suffolk are Post, which is to the eye by far the pleasanter type of the two. I should like to tell you fully of its working, but I have space for only the briefest account. The Post-mill is built upon a brick base, which is used as a granary, and which may be of any colour, white, red, black, green,

COTTAGE AT CHELSWORTH  
Chelsworth, lying completely hidden in a little valley, is Suffolk's perfect village. Its cottages are irregular, very well kept and finely timbered

C. de Paula





brown, that takes the miller's fancy. The base and the mill itself are connected by a thick, smooth, oaken post, suspended in the inside of the base, where it is supported by cross-beams, and running up to the top of the first of the mill's three storeys. Round this post the whole mill revolves; the step-ladder leading to the first storey is attached to wheels which move in a grooved circle round the outside. The whole revolution is caused and regulated by the sail-tackle, the large wheel fixed on stays above the step-ladder; it is the natural turning of this wheel that swings the mill round until it faces the wind, and then the whole complicated mechanism is ready to be set in motion. That mechanism, with its pulleys and whcels and chutes and stones, I shall have to leave unexplained. I will only warn you that if in order to see it working at full pressure you choose to stand in the little top storey on a morning when the breeze is lively, you will experience a period of acute mental and abdominal discomfort. As to the Tower-mill, it is shaped rather like a pepper-pot, broad at the base and tapering towards the top. Here only the top storey (properly the cap or bonnet) revolves and the sail-tackle, attached to it and on a level with it, hangs in mid-air.

Another building that I must mention is the moated manor-house, farm or, romantically, grange. It was provided with a moat for several purposes: to keep out thieves and raiders; to keep out chickens and cattle; to maintain a supply of duck and fish for food (this is about its only use to-day); to grow reeds for thatching; to hold swans for ornament. I do not know for certain how many moated granges there are in Suffolk, but I should guess that there must be at

least thirty. Though by no means the largest, by far the finest and most beautiful is Parham Old Hall, standing in the fields about two miles from Parham village. It is a lonely place, hidden, lost, decayed, forgotten and forsaken by all save its owners and a few itinerant enthusiasts. It was built in the fifteenth century, and in the days when it was the home of the Uffords and the Willoughby d'Eresbys it must have been a grand and noble mansion; now it is only a humble farmhouse, but all the more splendid and strange by reason of its gentle decrepitude. It has shrunk a great deal since the days of its importance; three-quarters of the area enclosed by the moat are now trees and orchard and garden. The north and east sides of the house are original in every detail; they are built of red brick and have fine mullioned windows nearly twelve feet high. They rise sheer out of the moat, which must give the occupants the sensation of living on a house-boat. I feel that if I lived at the Old Hall I should want to dive straight out of a window whenever I got bored with sitting indoors. I should probably be drowned at the first attempt, for the moat is choked with plants and duck-weed, not to mention families of mallard. The surface is so thick that the moorhens can almost run on it. The moat is, however, complete, and there is still an old brick wall round the east and south sides. The water has honeycombed this wall in a most fantastic manner. It looks as if it had no "innards" at all, like a target drilled with holes. More than anything else this honeycombing makes me wonder how much longer the Old Hall will withstand the inexorable forces that have worked upon it for five hundred years. These

forces are by no means purely elemental. In 1926 the grand stone gateway, bearing five shields of the Willoughbys, was most sacrilegiously removed to America. But what man and nature have left us is still one of the most miraculous buildings in eastern England.

The third building that I want to speak about is the Martello Tower. These Towers are placed at intervals all down the East Coast from Norfolk to Kent, and on the most deserted stretches of the Suffolk shore they are only a few hundred yards apart. They are grim, squat little fortresses, girdled with deep and wide moats which have now dried up. They consist, so far as I remember—I have not visited a Martello Tower for many years—of one spacious hall, two or three side-chambers, and some old, musty dungeons on a level with the bottom of the moat. They were built about 1800 as a check to that invasion of England which Napoleon never carried out, on the same principle as the little pill-boxes which were placed farther inland to hold up a possible German advance during the Great War. Had Napoleon landed, or attempted to land, the Martellos would have been very effective indeed; even to-day they look tough, solid and impregnable as great slabs of rock. And it would have been a Corsican against a Corsican, for they were all copied from a fort of the same shape which stood on Mortella Point in the island of Napoleon's birth. I suspect that the English made the copy because they were so astonished at the valour with which this Corsican fort withstood a cannonade from the British fleet under Lord Hood in 1794. They are cold, eerie places, these Martellos. Years ago, when I lived at

Aldeburgh, it used to be my delight on Sunday afternoons to sit in the dismal dungeons of the Tower beyond Slaughden Quay and, when I heard a courting couple coming into the hall above me, to send them shrieking and scuttling with a few ghostly notes on my penny-whistle. Those rooms were so clammy and depressing that even the fluting ghost could not stand them for very long.

None of the three buildings I have mentioned can really be said to belong to Suffolk and Suffolk alone. Now, however, comes something that we can claim outright and that is neither wood nor brick nor stone, but flesh and blood and very much alive—the Suffolk Punch. The Punch traces his descent in a pure, unbroken line from a horse foaled in the county about 1760. Without bias and without misgiving I say he is the proudest, most beautiful and most majestic shire horse in England. His hide is a rich, smooth, glossy chestnut, his barrel is rounder and larger than a steamer's funnel, his chest is deep and broad and powerful—and the whole of this great body is poised upon legs as slender and strong as those of a thoroughbred racer. This astonishing lightness of leg is easily explained: the bone which joins knee to fetlock is round instead of flat. The Punch is the aristocrat of shires; but he has had a hard fight for perfection. Some forty years ago his feet were so thin and poor that he was regarded as almost useless. They were his sole blemish, but a blemish so serious that it was thought to be incurable. Now, however, selective breeding has improved them wonderfully, and prizes are given at every show of Punches for horses with the best feet. Since the War the Punch has found his way

into all the corners of the earth. A few years ago he was unknown as a dray-horse; now he is a common sight in any London street.

And in Suffolk, of course, you will find him in every field, every marsh, every farmyard, striding over the plough, cropping contentedly in the shade of a tree, standing in dreamy and Titanic contemplation with his lovely head lolling over a gateway. Vast and mighty he may be, but by nature he is gentle, humble, inquisitive, friendly and always contented. A child could bring the greatest Suffolk stallion from Ipswich to Norwich with as little trouble as if he were leading a toy dog. You have only to show yourself in a pasture and the Punches will thunder towards you, surround you, fumbling, crowding, beseeching, whinnying, nuzzling, like outsize schoolboys persuading their master to join in a game. And when you have fought your way out of the gate they will stare wistfully after you, their eyes large and bright with childish disappointment.

Back once more to the countryside itself. Suffolk has been accused of being flat; and flat it is, in so far as it has no hills worthy of the name. But it has a wonderful variety: variety not only in crops (it is still one of the best corn-growing counties in England) and in the texture of the soil, but in its intrinsic make-up as well. We have river, valley, corn, plough, pasture, moor, marsh, wood, heath and sea-shore. Can the most restless mind or the most difficult taste demand more than these? As to the landscape, I would refer any detractors to the unanswerable arguments of John Constable and Thomas Gainsborough.

To my mind its beauty rests with three things: the wealth of trees, the size of hedges and the shape of fields.

I know a picture called 'The Unshaved Man'—he is a Suffolk man—which always seems to me symbolic of the county. There is a wild gleam in his eyes, his hair plunges down over his forehead, and a spiky stubble straggles round the line of his jaw. It is a clean face, but gloriously untidy—and that is just like the Suffolk landscape. It is a pattern of disorderliness. The stubble of it is a stubble of trees—trees placed without coherence or uniformity. They spring from the hedgerows, they line the valleys, they stand in lonely, watchful clumps, they straddle the country in thick and splendid woods. Long ago there were grand forests in Suffolk; the oak-woods that score the coast from end to end are the remains of them, and since they ceased to be forests they have been tampered with very little. The oaks are my favourites, and the oaks overshadow all the rest; after them I like the pine-woods, with their sweet, thick scent that soaks into my lungs like a drug, and their continual sighing. And then there are ash, willow, poplar and a score of others, all plentiful enough to make their presence felt. Such a small amount of timber has been felled that in the last five years I have not missed more than a hundred trees within a circle of six miles around my home. And in that circle I have seen some new ones—the fir plantations of the Forestry Commission.

Almost as haphazard as the trees are the fields themselves. Many landscapes are spoiled by vast, unbroken stretches of corn, which are monotonous even in the best of summers; but the fields of Suffolk are so small

(smaller in the east than in the west, where, I admit, they do lapse now and then into monotony), their contents are so varied and their shapes so extraordinary that from the air they look like the patchwork of an exhilarated sempstress. It is a patchwork that you can rarely see from the ground, because, as I have explained before, Suffolk takes great care to conceal its charms.

It conceals them chiefly by means of the hedges. The hedges are the key to the variety of the fields, and to the wildness and uncouthness of the whole county. They are fascinating, extravagant and dramatic. Hazel, may, bramble, blackthorn, anything that can find a place in them runs amok in a dizzy tangle until the hedges tower twelve feet above their banks and the overburdened lanes seem to contract to half their real width. And suddenly some infuriated hedger-and-ditcher, wielding enough implements to hack his way through a jungle (which is just about what he has got to do), will leap upon them, not to clip them into a delicate, topiary orderliness, but to raze them almost to the ground. Often I have walked along a familiar lane with a vague feeling that something was wrong, that a farm and a windmill have sprung up a little way off where no farm or windmill ought to be. And then I have realized all at once that a couple of intervening hedges have magically disappeared, as if someone had lifted them up bodily and carried them away overnight. So for a year or two I have a different view, until the hedges begin to assert themselves again. They spread outwards, they spread upwards, they straggle grotesquely, they loom majestically; the windmill and the farm are swallowed up once more as the hedges rise by ebullient stages beyond

the reach of man. Nobody bothers to control them; and just when they seem to have outgrown all the confines and conventions of civilization, that hedger, like Samson upon the Philistines and with weapons equally strange, descends upon them in his wrath, and then the whole process is repeated from the beginning.

I love these overblown and unruly hedges, and of all the jumble that clings about them I like the dog-roses best. Oh, those June roses in Suffolk, with their wide, delicate cups of pink and white! Nowhere else have I seen them in such mass and riot, for nowhere else do they have the chance to grow as they please year after year. For one month they run wild over the hedgerows, and their soft, spreading brightness blinds you to the deeper colours beside them. Their scent is sweet and slight, so that the faintest wind carries it beyond your grasp; but in the evenings, when the breeze has died away, it hangs about the lanes so heavily that it overrides even the scent of the hay in the neighbouring fields. I do not mind when the hedges are suddenly cut down, for in Suffolk it is a most spacious and unusual feeling to find yourself walking for a mile or two between cornfields that come sweeping down to the very edge of the lane. I am not even troubled that all their glory is ruthlessly demolished with them; but I do miss the dog-roses.

Because I have said that Suffolk hides its charms and that it is a difficult county to understand, I do not mean that it in any way repels your efforts. It is undiscovered only because few people have bothered

to penetrate its first layer of self-defence, and because there are so many other parts of England that satisfy the superficial needs and offer everything they have at the first acquaintance. But Suffolk is the reverse of obvious. Just as to fathom the nature and qualities of a shy person you must employ a certain sympathy and persuasion, so to overcome the diffidence of Suffolk you must approach it with a receptive mind and a discerning eye.

Walk through the county from the high, wide lands of the west, across the thicker, more confined and more sloping country of the centre and the east until you come to the marshes and the sea, and you will be moved by one sensation above all others: the feeling of solitude. Solitude, and all the beauty that goes with it, is the whole essence and character of Suffolk; not the severe, inhuman desolation of the wilderness, but that deep and inherent sense of peace which comes only from an old, wild land, a land too shy and too lonely and too forgotten ever to be tainted by the doubtful benefits of progress. Suffolk was once glorious and wealthy in material things; now it is poor and unkempt; but because no one has tampered with it, because for hundreds of years it has been left to mould its own shape and to decide its own destiny, it has managed to preserve within itself a calm strength and an inward loveliness which are the aftermath of its former power and pride. It is as if a high and noble family were to be stripped of all their worldly possessions. Their fortunes go down and down, but some intrinsic spiritual quality becomes stronger and more apparent in them, by contrast to their material state, with every buffet that adversity deals them. Thus it

is with Suffolk; and Suffolk retains not the shell of some vanished glory, but the whole essential spirit of it. It is a spirit that lies deep, that touches the surface from beneath; but it is something so strong and vital that only a little individual sympathy is necessary to coax it from its seclusion.

Such a spirit as this can only survive in an atmosphere of solitude. The loneliness that one feels in Suffolk is no trick of the fancy; it is a vivid, powerful reality. The hub of the world is quite close to you; but the solitude by its actuality leads your imagination farther and farther into realms of magical and extraordinary remoteness. I will illustrate my meaning in this way: the walk that I shall describe in the next chapter, through John Constable's country, up the valley of the Stour from Manningtree to Nayland, was made during Whitsuntide. London was barely fifty miles away, main roads were perilously near at hand, and Bank Holiday was a day so glorious that millions of Englishmen flocked into the countryside to enjoy it; and yet I met not a single "foreigner", not one of all those holiday-makers. As I walked I felt that I was the first person ever to have visited that lovely stretch of country since John Constable had wandered there, and that the Stour valley, so perfectly English, was yet specially preserved and set apart as belonging to a different age and an earlier England. The solitude of it was something immortal, real, tangible, almost alive. That is why I shall describe the walk in detail; had the country been spoiled in any way, or had it suffered any great material changes, I should probably have turned from it in sorrow and disgust.

This picture of Suffolk is no more than the prologue to a story which is partly description and partly adventure. As a setting to that story I have tried to give you some idea of the character of this country as I know it, of the wildness and the loneliness that I love, and of the Suffolk that I would not change for any other county in England.

## CHAPTER TWO

### JOHN CONSTABLE AND THE STOUR

"I even love every stile and stump, and every lane in the village, so deep-rooted are early impressions."—*John Constable*.

ONE winter's morning towards the end of the eighteenth century a miller's son from East Bergholt, an isolated village above the valley of the river Stour, took the coach from Stratford St. Mary to London with a satchel full of drawings of windmills and farms and valleys and a head full of ambition. His name was John Constable, and he was destined to be the greatest painter of landscape that England has ever produced.

London became his headquarters; there he sternly set himself to learn and to copy, to copy and to learn, and gradually to strike out on a new line of landscape painting in which he himself was almost the only believer. And he was homesick: always he was homesick for the woods and water-meadows of his boyhood, for all the ideals that he had left there. Whenever he had a few days to spare from the heat and clamour and drudgery of London, he spent them in the neighbourhood of Bergholt, and from every visit to that peaceful countryside he returned with a wealth of fresh inspiration. To the end of his days Suffolk was never far from his thoughts; he journeyed into many other parts of England, to the Lakes, to Sussex, to

Wiltshire, but nowhere did he find such a variety of subjects as in his native county. He loved it in every mood and every season; in his letters he spoke of it continually, longing for it when he was kept away, praising it when his eyes could absorb it once more.

The solid traditions of England may have kept her at the top of the world, but her capacity for ignoring the novelty of genius and her distrust of anything that smacks of the unorthodox have had some disastrous results. Never has a prophet been less honoured in his own country than was Constable. From the point of view of success, his was a sad life; and even given a strength of inspiration which enabled him to laugh in the face of "failure", without his great courage and even greater sense of humour he must have succumbed to the narrow-mindedness of his contemporaries. The English would have none of him; they did not understand his method and were unimpressed by his subjects. To our everlasting shame, the French were allowed to recognize his worth while we, with a sneer on our lips and our minds saturated with generations of convention and the tradition of the "brown tree", put him down as an unintelligible eccentric. In 1821 he exhibited at Somerset House a landscape painted on a six-foot canvas, which was, as usual, received with a minimum of enthusiasm. He sent it to France. "Think of the lovely valleys and peaceful farmhouses of Suffolk forming part of an exhibition to amuse the gay Parisians!" he said with a chuckle.

But the fashionable Parisians were far from amused. They came flocking to the Louvre, they fairly chattered with delight and admiration—and for his picture they

gave Constable a gold medal. That picture was the 'Hay Wain', surely the most *English* landscape ever painted! Has France forgotten the 'Hay Wain'? She has not. Last year it was once more on view in the Louvre.

The Frenchmen clamoured for more Constable, more lovely valleys and peaceful farmhouses. And about seventy years later, when the scoffing voice of Ruskin, the champion of Turner and Constable's most ardent detractor, was silent at last, England awoke to find that a new school of landscape painters, called the "Impressionist", had arisen, which was to become the most famous in the world. A revolution in landscape had taken place all over Europe—a revolution which originated in a remote valley in Suffolk. Then Englishmen began to wonder what it was all about; they turned to Leslie, Constable's faithful friend and biographer, and with his help they found some of the long-neglected scenes which the master had painted. All at once they realized that a genius had been amongst them and that they had let him pass without a murmur. Almost overnight John Constable, who had striven so long and so patiently without earthly reward, leaped into immortality, and with him into the arms of Fame went the Stour valley and all the ideals that it had held for him.

On the centenary of his death in 1837 he was honoured by tribute and celebration far greater, perhaps, than he himself would have desired; but he would have been vastly pleased to know that his beloved countryside is now a mecca for all who aspire to put an English field or an English lane on to canvas.

What are these few miles of country which all the

world knows through the medium of oil and water-colour, which day by day are gazed upon by a thousand admirers, by the highest and the lowest, by Englishmen and foreigners alike? They are just as Constable showed them, just as he knew them and loved them throughout a lifetime of trouble and ill fortune: woods of oak and elm and ash, sloping uplands of corn, flat, rich meadows where cattle browse in lazy herds, farms and villages that have hardly changed since he wandered amongst them with his first treasured sketch-book. Through all this the Stour winds smoothly between banks of knotted willows, and over it all lies that dewy, luminous freshness which was the essence of each picture that Constable painted. There is beauty in every such stretch of English countryside; but because of what Constable saw in it, because of what he made the world see in it, this little valley has been chosen above all others to represent the spirit of England.

Constable painted far and wide in Suffolk; he found subjects as far afield as at Helmingham, forty miles from his native village. But that stretch which everyone knows as "Constable's Country" is really the dozen miles of land bordering the Stour between Manningtree and Nayland. At no point is it much more than fifty miles from London and, curiously enough, it is the ground by which naturally you enter Suffolk, for the main road to Ipswich and Yarmouth crosses the Essex border right in the heart of it, while barely an hour and a half in the train sets you down at Manningtree, the logical point from which to start your exploration. Moreover, throughout the summer a special bus service from Ipswich and Felixstowe

will take you to the threshold of Flatford mill, one of the watermills owned by Constable's father, in which John worked as a boy; but to get the full value from the country I think you should come to it in your own way, and not be dumped down in the middle of it with a load of people whose company you could willingly do without.

This walk from Manningtree to Nayland was one of the most perfect I have ever had. And not the least part of its perfection was that I could actually trace Constable the whole way up the valley; his spirit was so strong over it all that in my imagination I could almost see his footmarks in the meadows. I stood here and I said: "This is where he sat to paint the 'Hay Wain'." I moved twenty yards and I said: "This is the exact spot from which the 'Valley Farm' was painted," and a bit farther on: "Here is the scene of 'Dedham Mill,'" and then again: "This is his very view of 'Stoke Church'." To find his views like this seems hardly possible after more than a hundred years.

I began my walk from Manningtree, and I shall give it to you just as I took it, as a week-end walk, for every inch of ground can be covered in three days at the most.

Even on the station platform you get some promise of what is to come, for the valley lies beneath you, almost hidden by the slope of the fields, and beyond it rises the uneven ridge of woods and cornfields in the midst of which was Constable's home. In another moment you stand on the bridge at the head of the valley, neither in Essex nor in Suffolk; on your right the Stour, stretching to meet the sea, looks like a huge,

mud-bordered lake; on your left the real valley begins to unfold as the river narrows and the water-meadows close in upon it. So thick are the trees on the slopes and bordering the meadows that there is no sign of village or farm.

From here you can, as a matter of interest, continue on the main road and climb the hill into Branham, for in Branham church is an altar-piece painted by the great man himself. But it is not a very auspicious beginning to a Constable pilgrimage, for it may give you an entirely false impression of him; if there is any danger of that, then you had best keep well away from it, especially as Branham itself is little more than a row of bungalows. The picture, '*Christ Blessing the Little Children*', is dull, heavy and without character. What Branham thinks of it I do not know, but the only person who has ever shown any real enthusiasm for it was Constable's own mother.

Branham is hardly worth a visit; far better to take the little road at the foot of the hill and set out across the valley into the heart of the landscape.

For a short way the road runs alongside the willows and poplars of the river's edge; but just as you are beginning to think that you need never again leave those endless fields of buttercups, the river gives a sharp twist to the left, taking the water-meadows with it. Here the road at once follows the slope of the corn-fields running up from the valley, and here, too, is a narrow path leading direct to Flatford and the Valley Farm itself. This is a crossroad indeed; when I first came to this turning I found myself in a torment of indecision. '*The Hay Wain*', '*Flatford Mill*', '*The Valley Farm*'—in a quarter of an hour I might be

standing on the very places from which those immortal pictures were painted. Coming down in the train I had been imagining the mill as I longed to see it, and my one wish was to get there as fast as I could. The path or the road? Suddenly, against all desire, some unaccountable instinct said "the road", and so to the road I forced myself. By doing so I missed the approach to the Valley Farm along the riverside, but I was glad of it afterwards; for after the Valley Farm, Bergholt, although charming as a village, would have been something of an anticlimax. At Flatford all the beauty of an English river and the whole essence of Constable himself are compressed into a space of three or four hundred yards; at Bergholt it is not so easy to catch anything of his spirit, for there are but few visible traces of him and his pictures of the village are not so well known.

Bergholt is a quiet, unpretentious village; it has those rare qualities which are the secret of Time and Nature, and can only mature when Time and Nature are given a free hand. It is a long, straggling place, high up behind the woods running down to the valley, with large, isolated houses and clusters of yellow plaster cottages built around the greens, and here and there a meadow allowing a clear, quick glimpse of the twisting river beneath.

Near the end of the village is the church, flint and plaster and rubble, screened by trees. The first thing anyone will notice about it is that the tower is missing, which gives it a quaint, unorthodox appearance; but from the west end there project three massive walls of brick and rubble, ivy-covered and pierced by two magnificent archways, which must surely be the ruins

of some crumbled part of the building. The odd thing is that they stand where the tower should be.

I was examining the front of these walls from the road, wondering how they came to be joined to the church itself, when an old, old man approached me and leaned on his stick a few yards away, regarding me with a solemn and disinterested stare.

"What's this?" I asked him.

He slowly turned his eyes upwards. "Tower," he said briefly.

"Who built it?"

"Ould Cardinal Wolserey," he answered, without changing his expression.

"Why didn't he finish it?"

"So fast as he was a puttin' that up," the ancient announced, "He was a knockin' that down agin."

"Who was?" I asked, out of my depth.

The old man's eyes lit up. "Whew was?" he echoed, in a voice of indignant surprise. "He was. The Davil, o' course."

I looked at him. Not a twinkle in those rheumy eyes. "Ah!" said I understandingly, and went in search of the verger.

Yes, Wolsey had financed the tower four hundred years ago, as a compensation for the money which he had levied from the parishioners towards the cost of his grand College at Ipswich; but he died too soon, and no one has ever completed his work. So there the tower stands just as it was left in 1530, with Wolsey's coat of arms, or the remains of it, over the archway, and nobody wants it finished now, for it gives the church a distinction of its own. The theory of the "Davil", so I was told, is still cherished by a few of

the most bigoted villagers. I suspect that old man of hanging around the church for the sole purpose of propounding it to the unwary visitor.

Of course, the bells had to be put somewhere when there was no tower to house them; so a wooden cage was made for them on the north side of the church-yard, and there they are fixed, all five of them, upside down on their hollow frame, and there the five bell-ringers of Bergholt come on Sunday mornings to ring them. The ringers are proud of their bells, and well they may be, for the tenor weighs 25 cwt., and I believe such a bell-cage is unique. "Yew oughter be here a Sunday!" I was told by him who swung the tenor for my benefit. "They makes a grand peal then."

The church itself is wide and airy; its two treasures are an old oak chest carved from the solid trunk, and an Easter Sepulchre, recently discovered. It has but slight connexions with Constable: a window to his memory, with a pencil drawing of his beside it, and a tomb to Abram and Isabella, his great-uncle and great-aunt.

The church and its surroundings have scarcely altered since he painted them. The cottage beyond the "tower" has gone, and the path has been straightened out; but the four-hundred-year-old sundial over the porch looks just as it has always done, except for a fresh coat of paint, and the two red brick tombs have not decayed at all. On the other side of the path is the grave of Willy Lott, owner of the Valley Farm.

Just beyond the church is the site of the house in which Constable was born, where the family lived before moving to Flatford. It is characteristic of

Suffolk that the inhabitants of Bergholt should have bothered themselves so little about the man who made their village famous that until a few years ago they scarcely even knew he was born there. I have been told that the traveller entering the taproom and asking where his birthplace was would hear something like this:

Villager, scratching his head: "Bless me if I dew know. Where was OulConstable born then, Harra?" "OulConstable? OulConstable? Over Dedham way, somewhere, I believe." "No, that warn't Dedham. That was Stratford way, warn't it?" "Oh, well, somewhere hereabouts."

They know now, however, for the site of the house has been turned into a tea-garden, and the knowledge was finally drummed into them by the royal summer which they had last year. Early in June the Duke of Kent came down to the village to cut the first sod on the site of the Constable Memorial Hall, and a week later Queen Mary paid a visit to Flatford. Yet even now the villagers are hardly "Constable conscious"; but then they have never seen his pictures.

There are few relics in the big garden where the house stood: an old, ivy-covered laundry, some stable buildings, the garden wall and gate, a lime tree and a yew with a wonderful cluster of honeysuckle climbing up it. The little house standing in front of the garden was built with the bricks that once housed the Constable family, and just round the corner the cottage of John Dunthorne, the village plumber and the friend with whom Constable shared his earliest love of painting, is now a bootshop. The two windmills which Golding Constable, John's father, owned in the village have

long since disappeared. On the timbers of one of them John carved with a penknife a careful study of the mill, and put his name underneath it, when he was only sixteen.

Leave the village for the Valley Farm and at once the whole atmosphere changes. Behind you are those rather dissatisfying relics; in front of you is the country where Constable spent so many hours of wondrous inspiration, country which has been immortalized as no other has ever been. The whole panorama of the valley spreads out beneath you, and a glorious valley it is when the meadow flowers have patterned it with a shining carpet and the grass is that deep, fresh green which only the grass in a water-meadow in summer can be. No wonder Constable loved it all, each tree, each field, each bend in the river itself; often he must have longed to take his critics and rub their noses through the grass till the colour of it came off on their faces and they choked with the dews that they refused to recognize on canvas.

In a moment you can pause at the roadside and know that you are on the very scene of 'The Cornfield', which is, I think, the most popular of all his pictures. That wonderful vista has gone, the trees on the left have been felled these many years and the lane is altered and overgrown; but the cornfield itself (a field of beans in full flower when I saw it) is still there, and the view down over the river which Constable perfected by the addition of Dedham church tower. Actually, he could not see Dedham from where he stood, for it lies too far to the right; but he was so fond of it that he could not help putting it in. He made Dedham tower the keynote of many of his land-

scapes; it can be seen from dozens of points along and above the valley.

It is a happy coincidence that the last few yards to the Valley Farm should be some of the most delightful in the whole valley. A lane branches off to the right, its banks are steep and tangled, thick with cow-parsley and ragged robin and campion; overhead the trees lean across and twine their branches so closely together that the sunlight can barely find a way through. And at the end of it, sunlight again, and at last, Flatford and the Valley Farm.

This is as lovely a place as ever I have found in all my wanderings. Here is the true spirit of England, all her beauty, all her peace, all her eternity in an old rambling mill house and a little timbered cottage and a pool where ducks and moorhens dabble in and out of the reeds. This was what Constable saw, and when he sat down to paint beside the low wall at the pond's edge he set himself to preserve for ever that spirit which none has ever understood better than he, for perhaps he had thoughts even then that it might be destroyed in years to come; but it never will be destroyed, for the cottage and the mill have been presented to the nation. If he could come back to it now I think he would sit on the little wall and paint it all over again from sheer delight in the quiet constancy of its beauty.

Constable reproduced his scenes with such exquisite faithfulness that you can pick out every change which Nature has made in the last hundred years. Except for trees on the right which have grown up thickly and blotted out the view of the meadows beyond the river, the scene of the 'Hay Wain' is almost exactly the

same. The little tree in front of the cottage has gone, and the bank on which the dog trotted has been made up, so that the water now laps right underneath the wall, from which a mass of grasses and flowers are sprouting. Sitting here, I imagined old Willy poking his whiskered face out of the cottage window at dinner-time, with a hunk of bread in his hand and a flaming neckerchief concealing the bobbing of his Adam's Apple as he chews.

He looks across the pool: "What be yew a doin' on, John boy? Be a paintin' th' ould farm agin, hey?"

"That's right, Willy," says John, a brush between his teeth, his eyes fixed on a shaft of sunlight slanting through the trees on to the bank.

"Don't yew niver git tired on it, boy?" asks Willy, gazing at him in wonder. "Don't yew niver want to be orf and paint somewhere else, like?"

No, Willy, he never got tired of it. He could have painted a thousand pictures within two hundred yards of your cottage, and each view would have had a character of its own.

And a few minutes later Willy comes across, sucking the remnants of his dinner from between his teeth, to stand in silence behind the shoulder of the tall, intent figure on the bank.

"Bain't that a marvellous rum thing!" he mutters after a while, and shaking his head he stumps away to lead his hay wain out into the meadows.

I have often wondered what kind of a friendship this was between the "handsome miller" who sought the reward of his genius in London, and the farmer who lived in the Valley Farm for eighty-eight years and only spent four days of his whole life away from



THE HAY WAIN

(National Gallery)

John Constable, R.A.

Constable said that his early days at Flatford made him a painter, and to the end of his life he found  
no landscape to rival that of the Scour valley



it. Probably Constable came in for a good deal of chaff from those simple, sturdy neighbours of his, who in their hearts must surely have admired and loved him.

The farm and Flatford mill and the mill house itself were bought in 1927 by Mr. Parkinton of Ipswich and, as I said, presented to the nation. The farm has been restored to its original condition, just as it was when Constable loved to paint it. It has fine timbers, huge fireplaces and, one would think, ample space to accommodate any reasonable family; but Willy's offspring were so numerous that they overflowed into Flatford Manor a hundred yards away. Willy himself slept in the first bedroom. There was no coming home late in his day; he got into his room through a trap-door, which was, in fact, the only way of reaching the second floor at all. Once he was there for the night that trap-door slammed down behind him, and an erring son had to do the best he could with the hard boards and dying embers of the sitting-room beneath, and then face the old man's wrath in the morning. Some of Willy's descendants still farm in the district.

There are fine views across the meadows from the bedroom windows; looking out over the river you can easily imagine the spot from which that grand picture, the 'Valley Farm', was painted, with Willy punting his boat towards the pool and Mrs. Lott, arms akimbo, summoning him to dinner from the kitchen doorway—the door itself is the identical one.

So far as I know, Constable never painted or drew from the front either Flatford mill or the mill house. He stood many times in front of the mill to paint the farm, but he never stood in front of the farm to paint

the mill, and it seems to me the one unaccountable omission in all his views of the Stour valley. Perhaps he could find no view of the mill which did not require a too minute draughtsmanship of the buildings and gave too little scope for that rich portrayal of nature which was his everlasting delight. Certainly he painted it from the back, and '*Flatford Mill*' is one of his earliest masterpieces; but here the boy and the horse and the barge are what strike the eye first of all, while the mill itself is seen in the background at a distance of some three or four hundred yards.

It is a fine building, massive, three-storeyed, with roses climbing high over its pale brick walls. A paradise for artists, it has been turned into large, airy studios, from whose iron-framed windows painters of every degree can strive year in and year out, without charge or hindrance, to catch something of the spirit of him who worked there a hundred and fifty years ago. At the back the water laps the walls within a foot or two of the sills; last year, during the same floods that ravaged Horsey, it swept right across the ground floor of the mill and of Willy's house across the pool. If old Willy had been alive it would have been worth a visit to Flatford simply to hear him trying to get it out again!

Just outside the window of the back room the mill pond rushes noisily over a fall, and here the mark can still be seen where the huge wheel caught the side of the opposite wall as it threshed its grinding round. Inside, one of the small wheels, which rang a bell to warn the miller when the water got too high, has been carefully preserved, together with the scales and weights for measuring the corn, the sack-lifter and other neces-



THE HAY WAIN POOL TO-DAY

"Country Life"  
If he could come back to it now I think he would sit on the little wall and paint it all over again from sheer delight in the quiet constancy of its beauty.



saries which the Constable family used when they set up business on a big scale and moved from Bergholt to the mill house at Flatford in order to be near the hub of their work. The mill house is built at right angles to the mill itself, and opposite it, standing some way back from the pool, is Flatford Manor. So there are four buildings around the 'Hay Wain' pool, and their total age is eighteen hundred years.

Constable must have been thankful indeed in later days to have lived the miller's life, to have toiled in the mills and to have come to know every intimate working of them, every approaching change of wind and cloud, as well as the farmer knows his own plough and the likely weather for next week. No wonder that his young brother Abram said: "When I look at a mill painted by John, I see that its sails will *go round*," and that Fuseli, the painter, wanted to call for his great-coat and umbrella when he saw the massed clouds rolling across Constable's canvas. Constable himself said that those early days at Flatford made him a painter; he owed everything to his environment, and to the end of his days he loved it with all the love which his generous soul could give. That love Nature repaid to him in a measure as great as she has ever allowed to any other man.

Flatford and its associations must have fortified many a weary spirit since Constable's day. Such rest, such strength and such solitude there is here, and so much deeper are these influences than all the hatred and the bitterness that has torn the world apart since last that eager genius set his easel beside the wall. If I lived here the summer months would drift by unheeded, months spent in idling about the mill and the

meadows and watching the martins busy beneath the roof of the house and the dragon-flies darting over the smooth, clear surface of the pool. Even if you have never heard of Constable in your life before, that scene will make an impression which your mind can preserve for ever; but if you should lose it, you have only to come back, and the same Flatford will be waiting for you, no matter how long since last you saw it.

Behind the mill are the scenes of two more famous pictures: 'Boat-Building', painted entirely in the open air in a meadow on the Essex side of the river, and 'Flatford Mill', which, unfortunately, can hardly be recognized, for willow trees and an orchard have grown up to hide the mill completely.

From Flatford there is a charming walk along the riverside to Dedham. All round the valley are grand thick trees and woods, oak and elm and poplar and ash—the ash was Constable's favourite. Here he used to wander hour by hour throughout the summer days with Dunthorne the plumber, sketchbook in hand, arguing the merits of this field and that, measuring a hundred views with his eye, while the shape of each tree and the scurrying shadow of each cloud across the corn impressed themselves indelibly on his ardent mind; and here, when at last the view was chosen, he sat so still at his sketching that someone who disturbed him one afternoon found a field-mouse poking its head from his pocket. The river here is quite wide, but shallow; it is fringed with reeds and willowherb, and old twisted willows lean precariously from the banks. Sometimes a scraggy heron rises and flaps croaking round the next bend, or a mallard splashes out of the reeds, and the scattered water shivers for

an instant like a sheet of breaking glass. Snipe and redshank dart overhead, and swallows skim and dip low over the surface. Several kingfishers nest every year along the banks, and perhaps one will flash past you towards the mill, orange and brilliant blue, lost to sight almost before you can turn to watch it.

Dedham itself is in Essex; but Essex, I am sure, will not grudge you a few moments in the village street to admire from close quarters that fine tower which has stood out clear against the trees all along the valley, and whose merits in landscape Constable knew so well. Dedham mill, subject of some of his best pictures, has changed a great deal and, unfortunately, for the worse. It is no longer the graceful building that it was when he knew it, although the pool and the surroundings are much the same. It can never have approached Flatford in beauty, and Constable must have known this, for in each picture he painted of it he improved it by little additions of his own imagination.

Another big change has taken place at Stratford St. Mary, a mile or two farther along the meadows. The little watermill which Constable used to paint has been down for nearly a hundred years, and in its place is a very different one, a huge, square, grey brick building, standing right on the main road. There is something rather pathetic about this solid, unimaginative place, for it has a kind of gaunt and desperate look, as if grimly fortifying itself against the traffic that rumbles about its foundations; if it stood in a more isolated spot you would go miles out of your way to avoid it. It seems to be quite deserted, and the water bubbles and rushes under its crumbling floor-boards.

This piece of main road which runs through Stratford is the only one that you touch on your whole journey; it is noisy, but while you are walking the three hundred yards to the turn to Higham you can console yourself with the thought that it was once an old coaching road and before that a Roman one.

So far as I know, there is no path from here along the river; but the road is little more than a lane, and a very pleasant one at that, coming almost to the water's edge where the meadows close in and sweeping away again where they broaden out to a tremendous width. The village of Higham is delightful; a handful of small cottages with wide, bright gardens running down to the green. It is built on the slope, and beneath it, with a squat little tower far below the tops of the yews and elms that fringe the churchyard, the church lies right in the midst of the meadows. A peaceful place this is; when I was there I heard only the noise of bees—three swarms of bees in the roof, that droned lazily through the stillness of the afternoon. Where the churchyard ends the fields of buttercups begin and a stream, almost lapping against the outer graves, trickles down to the river fifty yards away. Far across the valley the church tower of Langham rises high among the trees on the hill; on the top of it Constable often sat to paint, and from that vantage point he found some of his finest views of the valley he loved so well.

Soon the road climbs up from the valley and you have your first picture of real west Suffolk country—hedges almost razed to the ground, scattered trees, cornfields and pastures sweeping broadly from the very edge of the road over the brow of the ridge and on

into the flat lands behind. It is a grand land for corn, this, made fertile by the little streams that branch off from the Stour and wander away along valleys of their own into the heart of the country.

As the road rises, the Stour itself is hidden beneath the long wood of Tendring Hall, which runs out beyond Stoke-by-Nayland; but behind you, with the towers of Stratford on the right and Higham on the left, is a wide and splendid view of the valley, showing nearly all the country you have walked through since leaving Manningtree. Set in the oak and beech woods of Tendring is the pride of Stoke—the cricket ground. “Every bit as good as Lord’s!” I was told by him whose duty it is to battle with the weeds in the neighbourhood of the pitch.

If there be such a thing as a perfect village, then Stoke-by-Nayland must come very near to it. It is old and very quiet, beautifully laid out, standing right on top of the valley and sheltered by Tendring woods, which seem to run right through it and all over it. For Suffolk it is strangely uniform and tidy; even the council houses have a meek and pleasant look, as if to let you know that they will never intrude on the harmony of this old village. In the main street there is hardly a new cottage; they are mostly faced with that yellow and white plaster, characteristic of Suffolk, which conceals heaven knows how many age-old beams of fantastic size. Some of these beams are still uncovered, the best of them eighteen inches across and exquisitely carved. There are a few cottages of the overhanging sort, rambling, untidy places, with low ceilings and staircases wide enough to carry four or five men abreast. What centuries of simple,

unimagined history lie behind such places as these! The people in them change as little as do the cottages themselves; you can stand at the head of the village street and look down that row of old houses and know that they and theirs will never crumble and fall, though the winter winds sweep down from the north to tear at the chimneys with hungry fingers, and in a bedroom under the thatch a life goes out as a window bangs in the gale.

But the real strength and spirit of the village is the church. With its brick and rubble tower rising one hundred and twenty feet into the air it stands as a rugged guardian over the little cottages and the winding valley beneath it. I like red brick in a church; when the brick begins to chip and crumble it gives an added look of peace and warmth and age to the building. The villagers proudly declare that there is room to turn a cart and horses between the four pinnacles on the corners of the tower, and who shall say they are wrong? A truly magnificent place, this church, finely proportioned—it is nearly 170 feet long—and containing a mass of interesting things, brasses, monuments, miserere stalls and a porch of moulded brick-work. Alas! it has been attacked by the constant terror of every old church in the country—that polluter of sanctuaries, the death-watch beetle, has tapped its way into the beams all over the roof. The restoration of the roofs of the nave and north aisle has been completed. The roof of the south aisle is still being done; perhaps it has been finished by now.

Constable loved Stoke church. Scores of times he wandered up from Bergholt to paint it; who could resist that tower against the skyline? I do not know



STOKE-BY-NAYLAND

Constable loved Stoke church Scores of times he wandered up from Bergholt to paint it;  
who could resist that tower against the skyline?

(British Museum)

John Constable, R.A.



if he ever sketched from the top of the tower, but the views from there must be far and away the best in the whole valley—better even than from Langham. And he might have found another subject in two cottages just outside the churchyard, dated 1619, almost the finest examples of timber work that I have ever seen.

Stoke is such a lovely village that the best part of the day may well be gone before you turn towards the valley for the last time; but before you go, try to find time for a look at Gifford's Hall, a huge, rambling house, mostly Elizabethan, lying some way out to the north. It is a romantic old place, with a grand stock of legends. I was told by one villager that Bluebeard once lived there; the mark of his bloody hand is still clearly imprinted on one of the towers, and he got rid of his wives by stuffing them one by one into the hiding-places built inside the walls!

From Stoke church the road drops straight down past the woods and across the wide valley to Nayland, built along the borders of the Stour. Here there is another altar-piece, convincing but rather gloomy, in the church; and here the river's definite association with Constable comes to an end, for none of his most famous pictures was painted beyond Nayland. This, then, is the end of the journey.

One June evening I sat in the water-meadows beyond the town. Two miles away the pinnacled tower of Stoke church rose clear above the corner of the wood, dark and splendid against the fading pallor of the sky. As the sun drew his last rays from off the meadows I counted ten different shades of green across the valley, and I thanked Heaven for the genius of one man.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE WEST COUNTRY

THE boundary between east and west Suffolk is, roughly, a line running north and south of Needham Market, which is a small town on the Ipswich river, the Gipping, lying right in the centre of the county. I will risk the jeers of everyone living on one side of that line by saying that the west, taken as a whole, simply does not compare with the east. That is my own opinion; perhaps I am prejudiced, for the east is my country; but I have explored most corners of the west, and I still would not change for all the corn in Suffolk. It took me years to find the reason; I kept thinking it over, putting forward a score of different arguments, but none of them satisfied me. And then it came to me suddenly, as I was sitting one spring morning in a field near Woolpit, thinking of nothing in particular, and certainly not of the differences between the east and the west. It is simply this: the west is more civilized.

I don't mean that the people are more sophisticated or more progressive, or that the villages are more modernized. Neither modernization nor the comparative nearness of London has anything to do with it. But the country itself gives the impression of being more orderly, more controlled; it has never run wild in the same way as has the east, and for that reason

it has neither the same depth nor the same charm. You cannot lose yourself in it, you cannot feel such a real and overwhelming solitude.

Hedges—the hedges are really responsible. I have already spoken of their effect on the country; but in west Suffolk there are many long stretches with literally no hedges at all, or at the best hedges that are kept to, and often below, their proper size. And as the fields are larger—they are very large in some places—and the country is flat, there is often nothing to break the view. I am not saying that the west is monotonous; around the borders of the county there is every kind of variety, and wherever you find anything approaching a stream or a river the whole appearance of the country alters at once; but there is a high, flat belt of land running through the centre that lacks both hedges and trees in any number. Trees add so much to a landscape; in the east they are everywhere, springing out of the hedges, lining the roads—tall ones, little ones, trees of every shape and size; but on this large belt of country in the west they are confined to woods and clusters and copses, so that they have no ascendancy over the country.

I do not know whether or not the borderline between east and west Suffolk exists officially; but it is a strange thing that when you cross that line which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, you might be going into a different county. You can see the change as well as feel it. Everything becomes more tidy, more open, and certainly richer—for here are some of the best corn lands in England. Unfortunately, corn alone does not make a landscape. Once you get away from the big fields of the plateau,

however, that old wildness asserts itself once more.

It is the same thing with the villages. Some of them are really quite uniform, they look more reputable, and they are too tidy and compact to straggle. And then you do not find those isolated, ramshackle farmhouses and cottages, miles from the nearest village, doggedly pitting themselves against the inexorable force of nature; they belong to east Suffolk. If a farmhouse turns up in the wilds of west Suffolk, the chances are that it is a robust one, well cared for, as bright and unblemished as the yellow corn itself.

Give me east Suffolk for beauty and wildness, both of country and village; but when it comes to towns, west Suffolk puts us to shame. Its small towns—almost small enough to qualify for villages—are incomparable. The only two that I do not care about are Stowmarket and Needham Market; I find them both rather dull. In fact, according to an old diary of mine, Needham is a great deal worse than dull. "A horrible little place, disagreeable people—awful!" is how I described it; but this is quite undeserved and only due to the circumstances of my visit. I arrived there one evening in March, many years ago, when I was walking from London to my home. It was a cold, rainy night, I was lame and blistered and utterly weary, caring about nothing but a cup of tea, a slice of bread and cheese and a warm bed. Not one of these could I find in Needham Market, though I knocked up at least three-quarters of the inhabitants. Nor could I even get a lift to Stowmarket, but had to wait an hour for a bus. Hence the entry in my diary, which I now retract. Necdham is no worse than unexciting.

Apart from these two, the small towns of the west are as near perfect as can be. The best of them is Lavenham. Lavenham, with its glorious church and its sturdy old cottages, is one of the most beautiful towns in all England. At that I will leave it for the moment, for it has a special place in another part of this book.

I cannot tell you about all the towns of the west; I have picked out those which I know best. Two of them are on John Constable's river, so that the Stour, which goes right over into Cambridgeshire, claims some of the loveliest towns and villages, and some of the finest country, in the whole county. It has changed a good deal since it left Constable's home: the woods are gone, the valley is less wide and the uplands are not so steep; but the watermeadows are still there, following every inch of the river until it disappears over the border. Even if Constable had never had anything to do with it, the Stour would still have a character of its own, a character quite different from that of the other Suffolk rivers.

Long Melford is the first of my small towns, and it is the most romantic of them all. From the name alone you would think that it must surely be something out of the ordinary, and you will not be disappointed. It holds one of the best positions on the whole river, for it is built up a gently rising hill that leads sharply away from the valley; at the top of the hill another road comes in from Clare, and a little way along this road there are some lovely views across the valley and down the river to Sudbury. Moreover, in the narrow angle made by the two

roads all the choicest part of Melford is concentrated.

Long Melford is long indeed; it must be a mile or more up that wide, curving street to the corner, with the houses and cottages standing well back on either side. Once Suffolk plaster, pink and yellow and white, must have chequered the houses from one end to the other. But alas, many of them collapsed or were destroyed a long while ago, and at the wrong time; they were replaced by those shoddy grey or red houses that came from the gloomiest generation of builders ever known. The taste of the Victorians was a strange mixture; why did they put up such dreary buildings, when they filled the churches with extravagant and glaring glass? Still, Melford has by no means lost all its old houses, and it has one generously timbered pub, "The Bull". Then there are two of the finest Elizabethan mansions you could wish to see; it is a rare thing to find two such specimens within half a mile of each other, their estates only separated by the road. They are very much alike, both red brick, turreted and moated. Melford Hall can easily be seen from the road; Kentwell Hall, which I think is the better of the two, is hidden by an avenue of limes. When I walked up this avenue I thought I should never get to the top—it seemed as if it would go on till nightfall. I said: "If I ever get to the end, I'll count these trees on the way back. There must be at least two thousand of them." To my astonishment, there were only one hundred and thirty on each side! The moat here is broad and deep, the mellow brick bridges and walls thick with honeysuckle and roses reaching down towards clusters of water-lilies. Kentwell is a grand old place, in excellent preservation; it was the seat of

the Clopton family, who did so much for the church.

Yes, the church. Long before you get to Kentwell gates, Long Melford church stands out in all its delicate beauty on top of the hill. Architecturally it is about the finest building in Suffolk, symmetrically the most perfect. I am neither an architect nor an antiquarian, and nothing I can say can possibly increase its fame; but I have sat before that church with all else excluded from my mind and sight except the sheer beauty of its form, for Melford has that which would captivate the laziest imagination. Picture to yourself a battlemented church standing broadside at the top of a rising green, with tracery too delicate to be massive; a church some hundred and eighty feet long, containing nearly a hundred windows, with a pinnacled tower ninety-eight feet high; a church perfect in every proportion and to the smallest detail, which has been the pride of every Melford man for five centuries. There you have Melford church, and when you have finished gazing at you will find enough inside it to keep you occupied for the rest of the day. Excellent histories have been written of this church; it is not my place to add to them. There are monuments, brasses, a beetle-proof roof of Spanish chestnut, stoups, squints, the Clopton chapel with its quaint inscriptions by Lydgate, the old Bury monk, a Lady chapel which is a jewel in itself, and numerous other things that would take up the rest of this book if they were described in detail. Go inside and find them for yourself; or, if these antiquities do not interest you, simply sit still and admire the elegance and loftiness of the whole interior. It is like a cathedral, and certainly gives the impression, both inside and out, of being by far

the largest church in the county. Do I like it as much as Stoke-by-Nayland? The two are so different that it is almost impossible to say. The one is rugged, wild and massive, the other delicate, stately, with grace and beauty in every line. It is like comparing a rough old shire to an Arab racer. Perhaps the rough shire touches the deepest chord within me; for me there is more beauty in wildness than in anything else.

But my happiest memories of Long Melford are neither of the Halls, nor of the old, wide street, nor yet of the great church itself. What I shall remember to the end of my life is Melford Fair.

The Fair at Melford is held in such a lovely setting that when first you stand before it you seem to be looking upon a scene skilfully devised for the most romantic and imaginative canvas; and yet I doubt whether there is an artist living who could do justice to Melford Fair. And if there is, then I doubt whether people would believe him.

The long street of Melford comes to an end where the village green begins; that is to say, the houses fall away on either side, although the street continues. On the left of it is the green, triangular, a quarter of a mile long, sloping gently upwards; on the left of that again the cottages, the best in the village, lying well back behind fine, wide gardens, follow in a single row the sharp line from the narrow angle at the top of the triangle, which is the angle at the foot of the green and nearest to the village; on the right of the road stands Melford Hall, its mitred turrets rising clear beyond the tall brick wall, guarded by the moat which runs between the wall and the road. And at the top of the green, where it broadens to a width of

some two hundred yards, stands the long grey church, elegant and aloof, separated from the edge of the grass only by its churchyard and a sixteenth-century "hospital".

For three days every summer nearly the whole length of the green is hidden beneath a patchwork of flaming wagons, of tents and booths that shriek with noise and colour. The whine of the hurdy-gurdy and the roar of the barker echo discordantly about the churchyard and down across the valley, the eager crowds pour in to scream with horror and delight and to lose their money in a hundred different ways. Towards nightfall you have to fight every foot of the way if you want to get from the snake-charmer's tent to the weight-lifting exhibition on the other side of the grounds; but long before that, before the evening crowds have come flocking in with their yells and their gaiety, and while only a few children stood gaping about the booths, there has been a different kind of activity at Melford Fair. For Melford is a Horse Fair, one of the few surviving in the whole country. You must not go there expecting to find it quite as I am writing about it here, for my memories of Melford are of many years ago. The Fair has dwindled now, and often the trade in horses is almost at a standstill; but there is enough of it left to give you some idea of what it was when I saw it.

George Borrow has a strange connexion with Long Melford. Was it not with his "Long Melford", his right hand, that he felled the Flaming Tinman in Mumper's Dingle? If you know it not already, you must turn to *Lavengro* for the full story of that bloody and terrific battle, the finest description of its kind in

the language. I shall not reproduce it here, for fear that it would dwarf an experience of my own which I shall presently relate.

How Borrow would have revelled in Melford Fair in its heyday! There he would have met Mr. Petulengro, most mysterious of gipsies, crooning in his soft voice, after swindling some boisterous farmer over the price of an old cob: "Sit down, brother, and take a cup of good ale. We shall all be glad of your company. Your health in Romany, brother!" Perhaps Mr. Petulengro did come to Melford Fair; at any rate, his descendants still come there in their scores, and it is they who keep the horse trade going.

Here is an account of a day at the Fair, one of the strangest days I have ever spent.

The gipsy encampment is separate from that of the showmen; part of it stands on a wide strip of grass on the right-hand side of the road, above Melford Hall, the rest is huddled at the foot of the hill, in the bottom corner of the green. Between these caravans and the Fair itself most of the horses are tethered; but some of them, which are only hobbled, can find no room here, so that they must jerk and hop among the tents, nibbling dejectedly at whatever grass is left for them. It is early yet, and the gipsies are quiet, idling up and down the green in twos and threes; not that they ever fraternize among themselves, as do the showmen. I have always thought that Jasper Petulengro was an extraordinary fellow for a gipsy; most of them are vicious, surly, double-faced rascals, each living a subtle life of his own making, so rough and untrustworthy that even the most hardened countrymen will have nothing to do with them. They are a strange

people indeed; how they have managed to survive, and to maintain their traditions and their independence, heaven only knows. Perhaps many of the families have not met since this time last year at Melford Fair, and perhaps, from the manner in which they greet each other, with a nod and a few curt words, there are old feuds still to be settled. It is nothing unusual for a man to slink up and "cut" some unfortunate pony, slashing it brutally across the hind legs, when its owner is out of the way; of course, he is bound to be discovered, and then a fight begins, a fight that would end in murder if someone were not on hand to intervene.

At ten o'clock things start to look lively, for at ten to the minute the pubs unbolt their doors. They stay open all day by special licence, and this is the undoing of Melford Fair. (All this has been altered since the time of which I am writing.) In a quarter of an hour the pubs around the green are almost full; the showmen are there to wet their whistles in preparation for the day's shouting, the gipsies lounge about the bar-counters to discuss the prospects of sales and to decide privately whether each will prefer friendliness or enmity with his neighbour, while a few odds and ends, like myself, drift in to pick up whatever amusement they can find.

The odds and ends have not long to wait. Shortly before eleven o'clock a ragged little boy rushes into the bar and burrows his way through to the counter. Finding the man he is looking for, a dark, cadaverous fellow with a sly glint in his eye, he pokes him in the ribs and whispers a couple of words in his ear. The gipsy grins, and winks delightedly to his friends. In

another minute a burly farmer comes through the doorway, and a sudden silence falls. This is the moment they have been waiting for.

They make room for the farmer as he bustles towards the counter. "Which is Remm?" he asks, looking round the company.

"Me," says the dark man, moving towards him.

"Ah!" says the farmer. They join up and settle themselves against the counter, the fat, confident farmer and the slender, servile gipsy. "I seen a little ould pony o' yours down on the green," the farmer says. "A little bay mare. Let's have a drink." Their voices are lost as the noise breaks out afresh.

It is some time before they are ready to leave the counter. Everyone talks excitedly and begins to drink at double speed, and when at last the two men make for the door, the whole crowd swallows its beer at a gulp and follows them.

At the bottom of the green the little bay mare is singled out and freed from her tether. Two of Remm's sons, grinning, lead her to the edge of the road. Remm and the farmer are standing half-way up the hill; the rest of us line the grass verge, craning and chattering in expectation. "All right!" shouts Remm.

One of the boys leaps on to the mare and trots her up the hill, reining in to wait for orders. "Gallop her," says the farmer laconically. "Hoop-la! Hoop-la! Hoop-la! Hoy! Hoy!" shouts the boy, and away they go, the boy's ragged coat-tails streaming out behind him and the mare's hooves striking the hard ground with a sharp, metallic tattoo. At the bottom they turn round, and the mare stamps and shakes her

head. "Trot her," the farmer orders, and she comes clicketting up the hill again.

Up and down they go, while the crowd cheers them on, and when the farmer has seen enough we make for the bottom of the green, where a ring is formed for the real business to begin. Of course, he charges the mare with most of the faults that have ever been heard of and several, apparently, that are quite unknown to Remm. The gipsy simply stares up at the church and shakes his head.

"Six pound!" says the farmer at last. Remm does not even look round. "I'll put six pound five!" says another farmer from the edge of the ring.

There is a pause. "Six pound ten!" announces the first farmer, looking as if he hates to do it.

"Seven pound!" says a new voice. It comes from a little old man in a tweed coat: a wizened fellow he is, sucking a blade of grass, looking at nothing in particular.

The bidding quickens. The second farmer drops out, another takes his place, and the first farmer begins to look savage; always it is the little old man who forces the price, although he doesn't look as if he knows the difference between spavin and cow-hock. Soon it develops into a duel between this odd fellow and the first farmer.

At sixteen pounds the little man drops out, suddenly, impassively. The first farmer has got the pony; by his expression he hardly seems to want it now. We all troop back to the pub. "Good ould Jarry!" someone cries, slapping the little man on the back. "Yew done that well, chum!" And Jarry sits down contentedly to pour his rewards down his throat until the

next farmer comes along. Putting up the price is his job.

So it goes on until late in the afternoon—into the pub, back to the green, into the pub again. Sometimes a farmer comes off best, and then the gipsies snarl among themselves, ready to begin a fight with anyone who blames their tactics. By the time the last horse is sold, old Jarry is willing to bid against Mr. Pierpont Morgan for the Jonker Diamond. Gradually the Fair gets under way and the crowds come streaming up the hill to keep the barkers busy; perhaps fifty horses have changed hands, and the gipsies' pockets are swollen with money. It is back into the pubs for them, and no coming out until the drooping landlords rattle the glasses with their last despairing yells.

Remm, now rich and happy, has one particular enemy—Peter, a glum, heavy fellow, with the dull look of a boxer whose wits have been knocked out of him twice a week for the past twenty years. Across the hazy room, even amidst all the deafening noise of laughing, shouting and concertinas, these two keep scowling at each other, like a bulldog and a greyhound on either side of a plate of meat. It is obvious that there will be worse than trouble if either man can find the least excuse for it.

I draw my neighbour's attention to the angry glances of the two men, and ask him what is the matter. He looks from Remm to Peter, whistles excitedly under his breath, and tells me this: that last year, in the same place, Peter challenged Remm to a dance between their two "old women". Peter's wife was defeated, and Peter, perhaps in defence of his honour, perhaps from shame and jealousy, set about Remm with murder

C. de Paula

SUFFOLK PUNCHES

The Punch is the aristocrat of shires. His huge, powerful body is poised upon legs as slender and strong as those of a thoroughbred racer





in his heart and, catching him unawares, gave him a terrible beating before the two of them could be torn apart. Neither man has forgotten; each is still smarting under the indignity, and his hatred, smouldering from that night to this, is waiting for the slightest breeze to kindle it into a blaze.

Now, my neighbour is a sly chap and a schemer. Seeing how matters stand, he senses a fine bit of fun. He raps loudly on the counter for silence, and then utts: "Now then, what about a little dancing?" The suggestion is greeted with a yell of delight, and at the half the company gets ready for a community race; but my neighbour says: "No! no! let's have competition. Now, Remm," cries this cunning one, "I know what happened last year. Yer old gal beat ter's, and then Peter set and beat you. Settle it up, then: dance it out again!" Tremendous applause, while my neighbour winks and chuckles, well satisfied with his cleverness. The only man who looks thoroughly unhappy is the landlord, but nobody bothers bout him. As for Remm and Peter, they cannot decline the challenge even if they want to; they stand and glare at each other, Peter with the baleful look of a tethered bull, Remm with a smirk on his thin, contemptuous lips.

Remm's wife, who goes by the name of Little Lodie, is brought in from the green. She is a pale, delicate girl, not much over five feet in height, light as a leaf and with eyes as sharp and steady as a bird's; the other, Mary Lal, is already in the bar, a large woman, with a firm, swaggering figure, her black hair tangled and untidy, her handsome brown face flushed with a day of heavy drinking. A space is cleared for them

in the middle of the room; they stand facing each other, an absurdly incongruous pair, while a little musician, with a wide, dirty hat and a bright picce of cloth knotted around his throat, hops forward and tinkles his concertina.

"Wait!" cries someone. "You can't dance without a judge!"

Peter looks at my neighbour. "You'll do," he says.

"Him?" cries Remm. "Bah! We want a stranger. Here, let this fellow do it!" This fellow is myself. How I am supposed to judge the dance I haven't the faintest idea, but judge it I must; my willingness is taken for granted, and the dance is on.

Well, that dance lasted for about ten minutes, without a single pause for breath. Not one of the tunes did I recognize, neither did the dancing resemble any form that I knew; it had a movement and a rhythm that were at once natural and unorthodox. It began slowly, with a tune that might have come from the merry-go-round, and the women let their arms dangle beside them, twirling once or twice, trying to find the right swing with their feet. Then all at once the music quickened to something between a reel and a Maypole dance; a gleam came into Little Lodie's eyes, she placed her hands on her hips, she pursed her small mouth, she kicked her legs higher and dodged from side to side, her feet pattering a tattoo on the bare boards. Mary Lal bared her white teeth in a grin, she clasped her hands behind her head and her breasts drew taut under her rough blouse; where Lodie dodged, she spun, steadyng herself and throwing her feet out straight in front of her. Lodie set the pace, and steadily she increased it as the music

raced through her lithe little body; the musician followed her; Mary Lal gasped, her mouth fell open, she flung herself wildly round in her efforts to keep up with them. But for the drink that fired her blood she could never have kept going at all, for she was in no condition for such a dance; she had grace and rhythm in plenty, but neither the agility nor the experience of her opponent. Faster and faster went Little Lodie, springing and capering like a mad dervish; and I will say this for Mary Lal, that, with the tears blurring her eyes and the breath catching in her throat, she never once lost her rhythm. Her courage gripped that rough company nearly as much as did Lodie's dazzling acrobatics.

And suddenly, when the dance had reached a frenzy that rushed through my head like a mill-race, Little Lodie gave one piercing yell and dived head over heels, landing upright on her feet and remaining perfectly still. At once the music stopped, and Mary Lal swayed back into the crowd. Not a word was spoken; the only sound was Mary Lal sobbing and gasping for breath.

Peter looked across at me. "Well?" he asked defiantly. There could be only one result, and everyone must have known it almost since the beginning of the dance. I nodded towards Little Lodie.

Peter said nothing. His eyes narrowed, he clenched his fists, and he took one step towards me. But he got no farther. With one bound Remm was upon him, quick as a cat, sinking his long fingers into the man's bare throat. Whether or not history again repeated itself in this case I cannot tell you, for the gipsies, maddened with the dance and their drinking, at once

turned upon each other, snarling like a pack of wolves, so that in a few seconds the two men were hidden beneath a surging, crazy mob. As for me, if I had had Borrow's physique I might have set to and enjoyed myself; as it was, I had no desire to end up with my brains battered out or a knife sticking in my stomach. Heaven knows what would have happened if my neighbour, he that was the cause of all the trouble, had not suddenly seized me by the arm, jerked me under the counter and rushed me out through the back door. Why he did this I know not; perhaps he thought he had stirred up enough trouble for one night. I thanked him. "Are you going back?" I asked. He grinned at me: "This is our fight. You've done your job!" he said, and with that he dashed inside again.

So there I was on Melford Green once more, with the church a tall, grey shadow high above me behind the strong lights of the Fair. For a while I wandered around the booths in a daze, jostling aimlessly among the crowds. Then I went home to bed; and when I woke in the morning, it seemed to me that that amazing scene was something I had dreamed during a fitful sleep.

All this has been changed now. Not long ago a man was killed at Melford Fair, and then the Law put down its heavy foot. Nowadays the pubs are open only at their regular hours, and whether it be this enforced temperance, or the speed with which conditions have altered during the last few years, that is responsible for the decline of Melford Fair, I cannot say; but the Fair *has* declined, whatever the cause. It takes up no more than a third of the green, and perhaps

only a dozen horses change hands in the whole three days; but the gipsies are still there, a bit chastened, maybe, and it is still a Horse Fair. If the day should come when such things are allowed to die out, then England will have lost something that can never be replaced.

And here I will take my leave of Long Melford for a less boisterous haven.

Clare, my other small town on the Stour, is vastly different from Long Melford. It is the embodiment of peace and age. Not that Melford is not old and peaceful, too; but then my clearest memories of Melford are gay and riotous, whilst I remember Clare as a place of calm and quiet, basking in the shade of its antiquity. Clare has retained nearly all its old houses; except on the outskirts, there is little or nothing that is obviously new, and in the centre of the town the old lath and plaster almost rivals that of Lavenham. If some of these cottages are new, they have been skilfully disguised; if others have crumbled, they have been wonderfully reconstructed.

I have heard people say that the country around Clare is dull. I think this is unjust. Clare lies right in the valley; in fact, it lies in two valleys, for a little stream called the Chilton Brook comes down from nowhere and flows into the Stour at right angles, so that the fields all round the town, which are very large and treeless, have a long roll on them that gives them a grand and majestic shape, quite different from the steep slope of the uplands near the mouth of the river. This shape is an unusual one in Suffolk, and I

find it a pleasant change in summer, though I imagine that in winter the country must be very bleak, when the wind comes hurtling over the hill and down into the valley.

There are some very curious things in Clare. By the churchyard stands a gabled house with beautiful pargeting—flowers and branches twining fantastically about the walls. The date 1473 is carved on the front of the house, and on a side wall are two wide windows supported by oak corbels, one of them with a weird and elaborate carving of two men—at least, they look like men—holding a shield. An even more grotesque piece of carving is the sign of the Swan Inn, probably the oldest and strangest in the country. Really it is not a sign at all; it is a corbel whose window has long since been removed, a solid block of oak, six feet long, flat on the front wall of the house. In the middle of it is a huge swan, wings outstretched, chained by the neck to the trunk of some peculiar tree. The swan's body is shaped rather like a zeppelin; but even so, and after four hundred years, there is something so realistic about the curve of that craning neck that you can almost hear him hissing. His nether quarters are shaded by a spreading vine. At either end of this extraordinary sign is a shield, one bearing the arms of England and France, the other those of Mortimer and de Burgh, high and noble families connected with Clare in the days of its glory.

This is what the landlord told me about his sign: “That there ould block o' wood? Why dew iveryone talk about that daft swan as if that was a thing from the Pally Versales? Time I fust come 'ere I han't got

inside o' the door afore I say, ' Momma, we'll have that ould bit of owk down orf it an' we'll barn that,' I say, ' that'll save us coals for a month.' So I writ to the company to ask their permissun, an' the company writ back an' say, ' On't yew be a bloody fule, boy,' they say, ' yew leave that swan be, dew we'll tweak your ear till that bleed.' An' then med be a week later a faller come in an' he offer me a hunderd pound for th' ould swan an' I say, ' Out yew go, me bright customer, I ain't a goin' to sarve yew, yew've had too much ariddy.' But that warn't long afore I larned the company was roight, though what yew gemmen see in that there bit o' did tree bless me if I dew know." Thus lovingly do we in Suffolk guard our treasures.

All that now remains of the majesty of Clare is a fragment of the castle, once a fortress built to defend the harassed kingdom of the East Angles and later the coveted possession of many a powerful family, even of the Crown itself. The Earl of Ulster, the Duke of Clarence (the title comes from Clare), the Mortimers, Edward IV, Bloody Mary—the arms of all these great ones were once blazoned above the castle gateway. And now the outer walls have fallen and the space within the earthworks has been turned into a play-ground, where all day long children slide and tumble up and down the old green banks; while the castle of Clare has become its railway station, and the track is laid between the ramparts. One curious object was found when the station was being built: a little gold crucifix and chain, cunningly made so that the figure of Our Lord could be taken out and replaced at will. The Crown laid claim to this fascinating piece of

treasure; but it has now passed from Windsor Castle to the British Museum.

There are but few visible traces of Clare castle; a crumbling wall, half hidden by trees and ivy, and one side of the keep that stands on a huge wooded mound, 850 feet round the base and nearly 60 feet in height. You climb the mound by a spiral path that winds among shrubs and trailing ivy, coming out suddenly upon a little round lawn, beautifully kept, planted with beds of roses and screened by thick bushes; on the far side of it rises the tall, strong wall of the old keep, with clusters of iris and valerian growing at the foot of it and stonecrop, fern and snapdragon sprouting haphazard in the cracks of the mortar. Beneath this wall I laid me down, put a handkerchief over my face, and slept soundly throughout the summer afternoon; that is the effect it has on you, this windless place given over to bees and flowers. No, I did not dream of fierce Norman soldiers clanking about the keep and raving for one hour of battle to break the monotony of their watch—I should imagine that they slept here just as peacefully as I did, for there is no record of any invasion of Clare since Norman times. I dreamed of nothing at all; I woke up as the sun was going down and peered between the bushes at Clare Priory, on the other side of the railway line; so quiet and charming did it seem in the evening light that I at once crawled down the mound to look at it more closely.

This priory has been a private house for more than three hundred years; it was built originally by that de Clare, Earl of Gloucester, who brought the order of St. Augustine into England. Presumably it went the way

of all others at the Dissolution, but there are still traces of it embodied in the old pink-plaster house—stone windows, buttresses, and other things only apparent to the most discerning eye. All over the garden are fragments of the church and monastery—a cloister wall with fine arches, flints and stones in the brick walls, a refectory, sixty feet long, that has been restored and converted into a single room. Somewhere in the garden or orchard that borders the river a king's daughter lies buried—Joan of Acre, child of Edward I and his queen Eleanor.

And here I shall leave the river Stour, in whose water-meadows I have spent so many wandering and pleasant hours—not the least of them the one passed in browsing about this priory one summer evening. I love Clare; I am undecided between it and Bury St. Edmunds, the town where antiquarians gather.

If I had to make my home in a country town (a town, not a large village) I think I should choose Bury. Even if you care nothing for its antiquities, there is a mature, unchanging spirit about the town that will delight you from the first moment you set foot in it. In these days it is rare indeed for a town of any importance to retain more than a few traces of its ancient character; but Bury has somehow succeeded in preserving nearly all of it. There are no glaring shops, no farcical Olde Tea Roomes erected in 1937, no roaring trolley-buses; instead, there are wide streets with houses of every period except this one and the last, quiet thoroughfares, and two small rivers called the Linnet and the Lark, which are every bit as charming as their names suggest. You may spend a week in Bury without

bothering to enter either of its churches or to distinguish between the Abbey Gate and the Norman Tower; but the fact remains that the great beauty of Bury, the beauty which even the dullest of its visitors acknowledge, comes from one thing—its age.

Of course, all the life and activity of Bury was centred in its monastery. There are pictures to be seen all over the town showing this place as it used to be: it was both lovely and colossal. It extended over sixteen acres of ground, and in the centre of it was a church supposed to have been 500 feet long, with a huge tower. This abbey of Bury was once the richest in England. In power it rivalled Glastonbury; and as a ruin it does so still. I have seen both of them, and I would not like to give the palm to either; it is hard to decide even between the positions of the two, for Glastonbury commands the country from a prairie of marsh, while Bury stands on a hillside, one of the few rising out of that belt of flat cornland which runs right across west Suffolk. The monastery of Bury would never have acquired such wealth and fame had it not been for Edmund, the Saxon King and Martyr, whose body was brought to the town while it was still a comparatively meagre place and buried in the abbey church. A bigger church was soon built to house it; then attractive stories began to circulate about Edmund's death, and money and pilgrims came in so fast that in 1095 the abbot could afford to put up yet another church of stupendous proportions around the shrine. It paid him well; the renown of "the incorruptible body" and the mythical tales that surrounded it steadily increased in fame, until even kings came to pay their homage. The abbey basked

in its glory; nothing could go wrong for it; but apparently a good deal went wrong for the townspeople, for they had a nasty habit of rebelling against their abbot (once they even beheaded one of the priors) and taking everything they could lay their hands on, besides destroying various parts of the abbey itself. If you wish to know something of the internal life of this splendid place, you will find an excellent account of it in the chronicles of one Jocelin of Brakelond, a kind of mediaeval Boswell, who was chaplain to the great abbot Samson. He gives one fine description of how, when the shrine had narrowly escaped being burned out of existence, Samson unfastened the coffin and gazed reverently upon the sacred body. "'Glorious martyr, turn not my boldness to my perdition, for that I, miserable sinner, do touch thee, for thou knowest my devotion and my intention!' And proceeding, he touched the eyes and the nose, which was very massive and prominent. Then he touched the breast and arms, and raising the left arm, he touched the fingers, and placed his own fingers between the fingers of the saint. Proceeding further, he found the feet standing stiff up, like the feet of a man who had died that day, and he touched the toes, and in touching counted them."

Edmund's influence is by no means dead: his name is everywhere, the story of his martyrdom is told in a score of different ways all over the town; and of course he occurs on the town crest, which is surmounted by a wolf holding the king's head between his forepaws, a picture which rather reminds me of some benevolent patron handing out the school Challenge Cup to the *Victor Ludorum*.

Such, then, was the monastery of Bury St. Edmunds, a vast and beautiful place. The remains of it are scanty, but the great gate and the Norman tower (once used as an entrance to the public cemetery) are two complete buildings magnificent in their isolation; in fact, the Norman tower quite overshadows St. James's church, which stands next to it. St. James's is now the cathedral church of the diocese, and I must say that I think the authorities were wrong in their choice. St. Mary's (where Mary Tudor, sister of Henry VIII, is buried), at the other end of the abbey grounds, is not only the largest church in the county, but also a finer and more interesting building altogether. Actually, I find both these churches rather dark and gloomy inside; and St. Mary's gives the impression of being considerably smaller than Melford, because it has neither the lovely windows nor the high, lonely position.

Some of the abbey remains have been absorbed by houses and gardens; there is a flint chapel in the graveyard which has now been topped with modern roofs and chimneys and divided into offices and private houses. It must be a strange place to live in. Then the site of the great church itself is almost untraceable; the pillars which supported the eastern tower stand in the middle of somebody's lawn. On one of them, tall, thick and covered with ivy, is a tablet which tells that here Stephen Langton and the Barons met on that happy day when they swore to screw the Magna Carta out of the infamous King John. Within a few yards of this pillar the high altar must once have stood, and presumably the glorious body of Edmund lies near or underneath it: nobody seems

to know. It is strange that, with antiquarians vying with each other to unearth new treasures in other parts of the grounds, no one should have bothered to find out whether the remains of our Martyr King are really here or not. Perhaps it is thought that the turbulent career of the incorruptible body entitles it to a little peace and quiet in its latter days.

For antiquarians the grounds of the abbey must be an unfathomable paradise; I shall remember them best as a place where old men gallop ecstatically about the bowling green, where young men and maidens wander beneath the trees, where babies first learn to hold a tennis racket, and where, on the site of the abbot's palace by the banks of the Lark, shouting groups of boys try valiantly to emulate Don Bradman, with the abbot's dove-cot as an effective long-stop.

It was an inspired thought indeed to turn these hallowed grounds into a pleasure garden; I fancy that old Samson would have wished no happier fate for his beloved abbey. To this place the people of Bury come flocking in their hundreds, passing in and out beneath the huge, squat gateway—successor to the one which their riotous ancestors destroyed more than six hundred years ago. They have learned wisdom since those days: they treat their abbey with respect, they cherish it for its ruined beauty, for the gentle harmony of its flowers and trees and lawns. Strange that after so many devouring centuries this ancient place, stripped to the bone of its wealth and glory, its mighty form marked only by a few crumbling walls and pillars, should still hold the whole life of the town in its broken hands. What a different rule is this—no longer cruel, despotic, sweeping to the heights of majesty by an

unassailable power, but something infinitely gentle, spiritual, serene, that conquers from within, touching the very hearts of its subjects, and not their purses. The life of this abbey is like that of some woman, beautiful in youth, harsh and bitter in middle age, and at last peaceful, tolerant, imparting something of her own contentment to all who come within her radius.

Yes, the people of Bury love their abbey; here there is a different kind of pleasure for everyone between the ages of seven months and seventy years. High and low can mingle together in perfect ease: the man on the seat next to you may be a gardener in mufti, wondering whether lupins or summer roses will make a better show next year in the little bed near the gateway, and keeping a wary eye meanwhile on those two furtive youngsters edging nearer and nearer to the dahlias on the other side of the lawn; he may be a member of the Archaeological Society, fresh from his hundredth viewing of the five stone coffins of the abbots discovered not long ago on the site of the chapter house, telling himself that it really is time they did a bit more excavating in the neighbourhood of the palace; or he may simply be someone who has come there to think about anything that should chance to enter his head. If the keep of Clare castle is the place for a sleep on a summer afternoon, then a seat under the yew trees in the abbey grounds of Bury is the place for a dream on a summer evening.

I have written only of those parts of Bury which seem to me to contribute to its charm—a charm which is, I think, too deeply felt by all who know it ever to be destroyed. And having, I hope, done justice to

my favourite towns of the west, I shall continue with something of a very different character.

About six miles north of Bury there begins the most extraordinary stretch of country in Suffolk, perhaps in all England. It is called the Breckland. A strip about twelve miles wide, it runs northward from Culford Park right up to Narborough in Norfolk; in Suffolk its area is 145 square miles, in Norfolk 253.

This country has to be seen to be believed; it is quite unlike anything else described in this book—it is, in fact, quite unlike any other country that I have yet discovered. When first I saw it, it astonished and bewildered me so much that I doubted whether I should ever be able to give a lifelike description of it. I thought I should be like a village schoolboy trying to translate the *Odyssey* into good English verse. For to know anything of the Breckland it is not enough simply to live in it; you must also subdue (or heighten, or regulate by some means) your temperament to the level of its own, you must wander in it and about it, day and night, until it has absorbed you and all your faculties, (or you have absorbed it, I don't know which), until you have forgotten that other and more ordinary types of country exist. This is not a conscious process; in fact, unless your senses are at once attuned to the strange nature of the country, I doubt whether you will accomplish it in a lifetime of patient receptivity. It requires an almost spiritual effort. You may think that all this is overrated—go there, and see if you still think so when you come back.

The nature of Breckland is not isolation, but desolation. Its population (on the Suffolk side) is about

eighty to the square mile; the average population of England is slightly more than 700. Some of the parishes have such a mere sprinkling of inhabitants that their churches have either disappeared altogether or fallen into ruin and disuse; and (what is far worse for the traveller) there are twenty-seven villages that cannot raise a pint of beer between them.

There is something very expressive about the name Breckland. A breck is a field (or any area, for that matter) of sandy soil, quite bare of anything but stones, sorrel, ragwort, bugloss and thin, brownish grass; I can think of no other name of one syllable that would so concisely sum up the association of sight with sound. I said that these fields are bare; perhaps they are bare only to the layman's eye. I am told that the brecks are a wonderful hunting-ground for botanists; but, if this country were brecks and nothing else, I should think that even the most ardent botanist would run screaming for his proper home. Fortunately, there are several miles of heathland and large areas of forest: of both of these I shall say something prescntly. If any of it can be called "best", then Norfolk has the best of the Breckland country. Above all, it has the meres, with their wonderful variety of ducks and water-birds; Suffolk has only a few isolated pools.

I feel a great admiration for the man who can spend all his life on the Breckland, and who can say at the end that he has come to a perfect understanding of it, that he would not choose any other country if he had his life to live over again. He will not mind my saying that I think he must be a very unusual character, a character independent of the external influences essential to most of us; at any rate, his

instincts are most certainly born with him, and not cultivated. For myself, I could never live on Breckland. I love heaths—in moderation. I love gorse and bracken and heather and pine trees and all the birds of the heathland; I know many heaths on which I would willingly make my home. And I am not averse to a few miles of breck—provided I know that there is something within reach beyond it. But to live in the heart of Breckland would be for me as if I were cast adrift in the middle of the sea, with the nearest land a thousand miles away. Leagues and leagues and leagues of it around me—I believe I should go raving mad. It is not a feeling of being shut in or suffocated: it is precisely the opposite. You feel that you are loose in some vast, flat, limitless arena, that all about you, beyond your sight, there is something which you most desperately want, and that if you run all your life and in any direction you will never reach it.

From this you will probably think that I look upon Breckland with intense dislike. Far from it. In many ways it fascinates and delights me; but I must also confess that there was once a time when it filled me with something akin to terror. A strange admission, this, of a feeling that I cannot quite explain even to myself. I have never yet met anything in the countryside that frightened me; only the townsman is afraid of the dark, of the short, sharp, unearthly blackness of a summer night; to me this darkness, with its strange noises and eerie shapes, is something to be explored, something which it is the countryman's prerogative to understand and which, once understood, is a source of continual novelty and delight. In the depth of night I have struggled along the wild

sea-shore in a raging gale, I have been utterly lost in silent and deserted marshes, I have swum a wide river with my clothes tied to my head, unable to see the shore until my feet scraped on the soft mud—always I have been quite alone, yet perfectly at ease, because my surroundings have been those which I have known all my life, and evry smallest thing about them has been familiar, whether I could see it or not. But on the Breckland there has been, at certain moments, some latent power, something sinister and evil, which I could not understand. I have often wondered whether any of those who live on Breckland have felt something like it in the same circumstances.

The first time that ever I opened my eyes to look at Breckland was on a bright morning of early summer. It was the ideal day for exploration, and by ten o'clock I had set out for Lakenheath Warren (most of the Breckland heaths are called warrens), a stretch of about three thousand acres, which, I had been told, was the most interesting country I should find in the district. Having always prided myself on my sense of direction, I took no map with me. I simply threw down my bicycle and set out to walk at random.

Almost at once I noticed a very extraordinary thing. I turned round to look at the country behind me, and for a moment stood gazing westward at the long ridge of hill at the top of the warren, which is the approximate boundary between Breckland and the Suffolk Fens. As I looked, there came between me and that distant view a line of heavy motor-buses, five in all, travelling down the straight road from Brandon to Mildenhall. I watched them casually, dimly aware that there was something peculiar about them;

but I could not think what was puzzling me until the buses were right in front of me. It was this: although they were barely three hundred yards away, and the ground between us was absolutely bare, *I could not hear a sound of them.* I was amazed; I thought I must be going deaf. I waited. Presently a lorry came, and close behind it two high-powered cars. Not a murmur could I hear, although there was no wind to carry the noise away. Is there something in the nature of this land which intercepts all heavy sound, all vibration, that comes from its own level—deadens and stifles it? That seems to me the only solution.

I walked on, and before I had gone another hundred yards I saw a pair of Norfolk plovers, large, grey-white birds with shapely, curving wings, that rose before me with a shrill and sorry piping. I saw several of them during the day, but I never caught sight of Breckland's other most treasured bird, the little ringed plover; I believe he prefers the open brecks to the heathland itself. I had heard that more than a hundred different birds nest on Breckland, and it seemed to me that I saw most of them that day: wheatears, stonechats, whinchats, pipits, skylarks, buntings and a score of others. Once I even thought I saw a Montagu's harrier beating his way across the heath. I remembered, too, that this had been the last stronghold in Britain of that mythical fellow, the Great Bustard.

I found myself walking on a strange type of country. For the most part it was dry, stiff, brownish grass—presumably the same sort as that which covers the brecks—changing suddenly to lichen-moss, in colour a pale, duck's-egg green, spongy and elastic. I noticed that this took a very deep and accurate impression

of my footprints, and could not help thinking that it would hardly be necessary to use bloodhounds to trail a criminal across such ground. I remembered having crossed some country very like it on Hardy's Egdon Heath in Dorsetshire. This lichen or moss gradually gave way to heath—long stretches of young green bracken, then wide strips of heather, very thick and tall, again more bracken, and so on. Nearby on my left was a solid forest of young fir trees (which I knew to be the work of the Forestry Commission) stretching, as I guessed, right away over the Suffolk boundary. There seemed to be few trees of any other sort: occasional belts of pine, little more than isolated clumps, and here and there single trees standing lonely in the middle of the heath; some of these were mays, others were twisted into such bare and fantastic shapes that from a distance it was impossible to say what they might once have been. I could imagine Gray-malkin and her lurid friends enjoying a busman's holiday if ever they came this way on a stormy night.

But the day was fine and warm, and I soon began to like this endless and unfamiliar stretch of country. The colours of the heath seemed to be changing with every few yards that I walked; I wandered right and left hunting up innumerable small birds; I stalked the stone curlews and stood still as the lapwings wailed about my head; I examined some curious formations called "blow-outs", shallow sandpits made by the wind; and I saw such thousands of rabbits that I thought what a good punishment it would be to make some transgressor take a census of them. Of course, I walked in so many curves and circles that I soon

got lost; but I worried very little about that. In fact, I doubt whether I thought of it at all.

I sat down to eat my sandwiches, and after a while walked on again. And I suppose it was about two o'clock that I suddenly felt a chill in the air and noticed a shadow, a long, unbroken shadow, creeping steadily across the heath. I looked up and saw a cloud in the act of covering the sun. Now, this was no ordinary cloud; it was a huge cloud, a solid cloud, infamously black, pregnant with threats and treacheries, backed up by a phalanx of companions stretching unbroken to the horizon. Yes, rain; any fool could have seen that. What worried me was where I should go. I looked at the edge of the fir forest on my left, and I felt that once I got inside it I should never get out again—it looked thick and airless enough to suffocate me. Besides, I should probably have to lie flat on my stomach. Rather than the serrated ranks of the firs I chose a lonely clump of pines standing on a little knoll in the opposite direction, about three-quarters of a mile away. I now saw that the whole of the heath, even the atmosphere itself, was tinged with that ghastly, livid colour, so unnaturally bright, which is the presage of a storm. Every living thing was quiet; all the birds, so loud a moment ago, had stopped singing, as if some unseen hand had swept them off the face of the heath at one stroke. This was strange, for I have heard the birds rise to a crescendo of noise, of terrified noise, before a storm. But now the whole pulse of Nature was arrested; the earth and all that was on it seemed to hold its breath, waiting, waiting, waiting, as a man coming up through the sea waits in agony for his stifled lungs to burst. It

was the quickest and most astounding transformation I have ever known.

The clouds moved ponderously, surely, as if knowing that there was no escape. I began to walk as fast as I could towards that distant clump of pines.

Big raindrops fell, slowly at first and innocuously, while the livid light faded off the heath. In another moment they came pouring down, hissing and spluttering, and with them came the wind, such a wind as I had never thought possible so far from the coast. Not the strong and steady gale, but the venomous, screeching gust, frenzied and savage, that tears through you and past you, rips your soul from your body, and as suddenly is gone, hurtling on into the distance, while everything in its wake gasps and reels and gropes feebly after its scattered senses. In that moment I knew what it must feel like to be disembowelled. I thought it was my dizziness that made the air and earth seem suddenly black. But no, it was real enough, a damp, swamping blackness, like that which precedes the gradual lifting of a miserable winter's night.

Already drenched to the skin, with the rearguard of the wind lashing the rain into my mouth and eyes, I ran, stumbled, jumped, and finally, numb and exhausted, dragged myself up the knoll towards the pines. Again the wind rushed and died, more appalling than before, but I was beyond caring—I had nothing left for it to destroy. And as I crawled towards the nearest trunk a blinding flash of lightning flared suddenly through the thick darkness, and after it came the roar of the first thunder.

How long I remained flattened against my tree, which gave me no real shelter whatever, I do not

know. At first I fell into a frightful panic, shivering all over, my hands shaking so that I could hardly grip the trunk; then a kind of resigned weariness came over me and I recovered sufficiently to notice that a grey, swirling mist, which blurred the whole form of the country, was taking the place of the hideous blackness. The storm seemed to hang right overhead; before each burst of thunder the wind came racing crazily across the heath, and some despairing spirit moaned and sighed behind it. To my distracted mind it seemed like the wailing of an agonized, demented brute, stretched fantastically across the earth, writhing in the fierceness of the wind; certainly there was nothing alive on the heath that could have made that noise. And with the thunder came an answering rumble out of the depths of the ground, the accumulation of a million years of death and decay brought to life by the clashing of elemental forces.

It went on and on. Never have I been so lonely and wretched. It was not the storm itself that reduced me to a state of shivering impotence, but some frightful, heaving passion drawn out of the earth. Something seemed to awake on Breckland, some old, dead force that struggled and swelled to join the battle of the tempest. At such moments man can do nothing; he must cower and wait, while the raging and the fury batter themselves to exhaustion.

I was adrift in an atmospheric whirlpool; I felt that there were sullen, devilish influences, about which I knew nothing, stirring in the earth all around me. Any lover of Breckland will tell you that the spirit of the place is primeval, preserved in all its strength because the land is desolate, useless, cut off from the rest of

England. Perhaps it was this spirit that moved over Breckland in the savagery of the storm on that summer afternoon.

The lover of Breckland will further tell you that he sees this primeval spirit vanishing before his eyes. He puts the blame on the encroachment of the Forestry Commission. How right he is I am not really in a position to decide, because my knowledge of the Breckland in its original state was but a slight one; but, on the whole, I think there is a great deal of truth in what he says. After all, you cannot take an area of fifty thousand acres and plant it solid with little fir trees without altering the nature of the country. (Fifty thousand acres is the area actually owned by the Commission—about four-fifths of it have been planted to date.) Beginning in 1922, the Commission has worked its way steadily through the centre of Breckland, buying and leasing estates, removing boundary after boundary, until now there is scarcely a couple of miles of ground left unplanted between Lakenheath Warren and Elveden in Suffolk and the road from Methwold to West Wretham in Norfolk. It has swept everything before it; the heaths and brecks in its path have disappeared for ever. Small wonder that those who loved the old spirit of Breckland should complain that they can now scarcely even recognize their own country. For myself, I have rather a fondness for fir plantations; but I must admit that I should like these ones a great deal more if they were not so dense and continuous. Large areas have been planted near my own home, and I find that they increase the beauty of the heaths, because they are

broken up and more or less isolated; but on Breckland the main portions have been joined into a solid mass called the Thetford Chase, and this amalgamation has killed their beauty. The Commission has several out-lying areas, too, at Swaffham, Hockham, West Harling and Culford. Breckland, say the inhabitants, is disappearing. Under a mantle of fir it no longer retains its old qualities.

Then they say that the stone curlew and the ringed plover are being driven from their lonely haunts. I suppose this is true, too, for some of the land which the birds have been using for centuries has now been absorbed by the Commission. The question really is—how much more, if any, does the Commission intend to acquire? One stretch, at any rate, that can never be planted is Lakenheath Warren itself. Some ancient Common Law decrees that it may not be sold unless all the tenants give their consent. When this came to light, the Norfolk Naturalists' Trust promptly installed one tenant whose job it is to sit with his feet on the mantelpiece and say NO until it is time for him to depart for the next world —when, presumably, another tenant will be waiting with the syllable ready upon his lips.

On its side, the Forestry Commission certainly presents an excellent case. Scores of small birds, it says—some of them quite rare, like the crossbill—are finding the forest a paradise for nesting purposes. It pooh-poohs the idea of winged vermin; but I suspect that jays and crows, to mention only two, will soon overrun the place. Badgers and foxes (in the last fifty years the former have been cruelly harassed) are on the increase—that's all very well, but as Breckland

is one of the richest game countries in England, I can see another conflict ahead.

Then the Commission claims to be lessening the danger of heath fires by having an elaborate fire-alarm system, as well as a chain of look-out towers with men stationed on them all day long from February to October.

As to the land itself, no one will deny that agriculture on Breckland has always been a superhuman struggle. What with the soil and the elements, the crops are hard put to it to survive at all. It is recorded that one humorist, asked where his farm was, replied: "Times thass in Norfolk, boy, times thass in Suffolk. That dew dipind which way the wind's a blowin'." Well, much land given up as hopeless, derelict of everything but ragwort and rabbits, has been accounted for by the Commission—is some of this the land whose loss the lovers of Breckland are bewailing?—and many almost deserted settlements have been renovated for the forest workers. What it really amounts to is that the Commission regards itself as the saviour of Breckland, while the Brecklanders regard the Commission as the destroyer of it.

I told one Forester quite plainly that I did not like his colossal tracts of small trees. He said: "None of them is much more than ten years old. If they are properly weeded out and allowed to grow to their full height, which may be anything up to seventy feet, then you can look forward to a magnificent sight. You won't need to go to the Black Forest any more; you can come to Breckland instead!" Incidentally, I have been calling these trees firs. They only look like firs: most of them are either Scots or Corsican pine.

Finally, I was told that I could thank my stars that the War Office—what we in Suffolk called “the Military”—didn’t get the land first. I promised to thank my stars most fervently. I thought of Salisbury Plain, and shuddered. The Military would have been a nightmare. There is already an Air Ministry bombing-ground on Berner’s Heath, and that is quite enough.

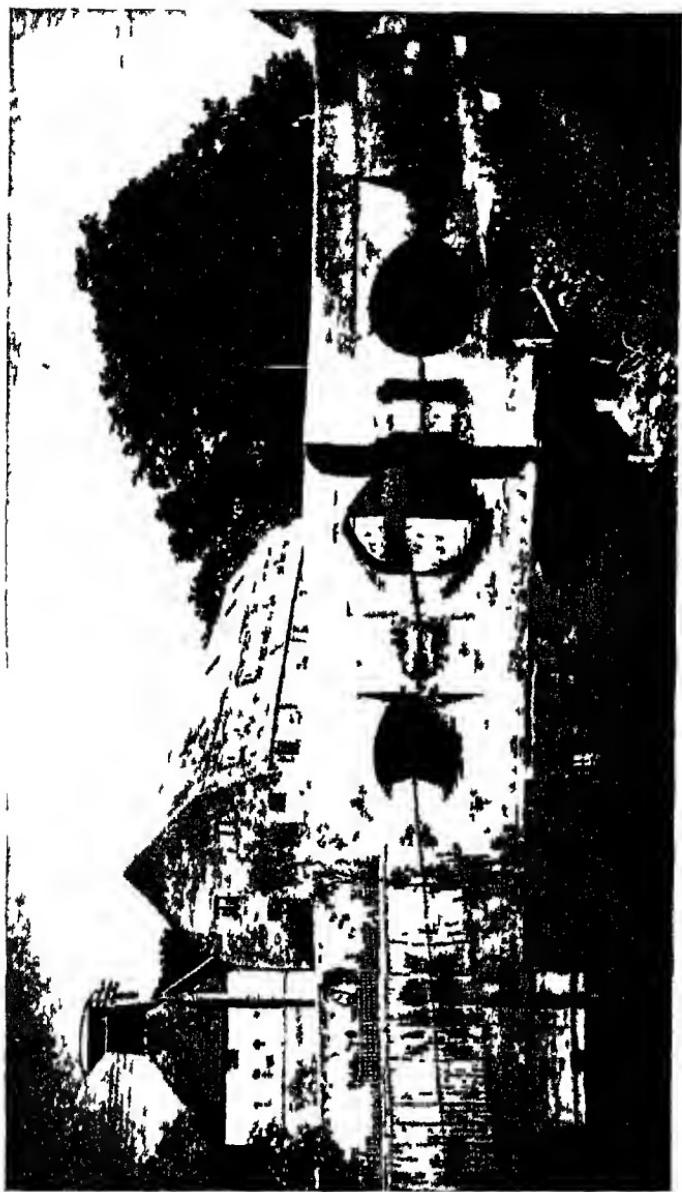
Yes, the Commission has much to say in its favour, but in the end I am inclined to think that those who live on Breckland have right on their side. Their heritage, the desolate, primeval spirit of the land they love, is being stamped out ruthlessly and for ever. It is the old, old story that one hears all over England, but very rarely, thank heaven, in Suffolk.

It seems rather ironic that Breckland, one of the most thickly populated districts in England thousands of years before London was ever thought of, should now have fewer inhabitants than any other stretch of country of the same size between Northumberland and the New Forest. In prehistoric times it reached the peak of its glory; since then it has drifted gradually into waste and nothingness. Heaven knows how its villages maintain themselves; they are sparse, isolated, poor, with none of the comforts of modernity. A typical one is Wangford, standing just off the high road between Brandon and Mildenhall, on a stretch of thin grass and sand-dunes. It consists of two flint cottages, one old farmhouse (once a Hall, the home of Sir Robert Wright, Lord Chief Justice, who presided at the trial of the Seven Bishops) and a sturdy little church, which is not connected with the outer world by any visible path that I could find. It is extra-

ordinary that such places can exist in these days, and this, though one of the smallest villages on Breckland, is not one quarter so bleak as many others I know.

One charming town the Suffolk Breckland has, and that is Brandon, in the wooded valley of the Little Ouse. The oldest part of Brandon lies some way out of the town, a tiny settlement in the valley beyond the church; every one of its cottages is built of flint. In the town itself there are still several rows of flint houses, two-storied, roofed with red tiles. Looking at them it seems impossible that you can be in Suffolk, the Suffolk of plaster and stucco and old timbers; you imagine yourself in some fishing village on the Scottish coast. One strange thing about these cottages is that they look almost new. Someone pointed out to me a row that had been condemned: it might have been built the week before. But if the cottages look new, then Brandon bridge, with its four ill-assorted arches, looks magnificently old. It is grey and crooked and narrow, and gives the impression of being lopsided because the recesses on either side are quite different in shape. It is built of brick and stone, patched with plaster, embellished by irregular tufts of plants and lichens. Beside it on the bank of the Little Ouse stands a long grey malting, gabled and solid; water-meadows, a malting, a bridge, a cluster of old houses—this is as lovely a corner as any I have found in Suffolk. And although the road is a busy one, it seems to have little effect on its surroundings, for within two hundred yards of the bridge I have seen redshank, snipe, plover, moorhen and teal.

The flint cottages of Brandon are the only visible link with the former importance of the town. They



BRANDON BRIDGE

C de Paula  
It is old, grey, crooked and narrow, with four ill-assorted arches which give it a lop-sided air



were built in the days when Brandon thrived on its famous industry of flint-knapping. Anyone who knows the first thing about Suffolk has heard of flint-knapping; it means the shaping of flints for every conceivable purpose to which they can be put. Brandon was the Sheffield of the Stone Age; it supplied the hairy warriors of Britain with millions and millions of first-quality arrowheads made of Breckland flint. I imagine that it almost monopolized the trade, both of arrowheads and other implements, and that any Neolith who didn't get his weapons from Brandon was considered a pretty inferior fellow. These implements are still to be found in scores all over Breckland, and the original flint-mines at Grime's Graves, just across the Norfolk border, can be inspected by one and all.

It is romantically supposed that knapping has never once been discontinued since first it began in those atavistic days. Well, and why not? When the arrowheads went out of date there came houses, churches, tinders, gun-flints and many other things—and even in the gaps between I warrant there was plenty for the knappers to do, for flint must always have had its uses, whatever they may have been. It is quite likely that the ornamental work of every flint church in Suffolk was conceived in Brandon, while the inhabitants still declare proudly that the battle of Waterloo was won not on the playing-fields of our greatest public school, but in the quarries around a little town on the Ouse, which supplied the flints for every British musket levelled at Napoleon's army.

And now the knappers are in a sorry plight. There are but five of them, where once there may have been more than fifty. Percussion-caps have killed the gun-

flint trade in England; matches have supplanted tinders; nobody has built a flint cottage for years and years. Perhaps what saddens them most of all is that Mr. Ashley, their local quarrier, retired two years ago at the age of seventy-three, having worked his quarry on Lingheath Common, alone and with his bare hands, until he could no longer wield his pick. The quarry stands deserted; there is no successor to the valiant Mr. Ashley. This means that the flint now has to come from Norwich, and a very inferior stone it is, say the knappers. The only Brandon stone used to-day is that which is found occasionally and almost by accident in the chalk quarries.

The knappers' trade is now reduced to infrequent ornamental work in the restoration of churches, a tinder here and there for some unfortunates in distant lands who are forbidden the use of matches for fear of setting fire to the crops, and a few prehistoric implements for museums; in their spare time they make scores of different weapons, knives, battle-axes, spear-heads and arrowheads, and hang them around their own walls, smiling bitterly, no doubt, at the thought of what their distant ancestors would have said to such a waste of fine material. What really keeps them going is something that, if it were not pathetic, would be laughable: they supply a large quantity of gun-flints for barter with the natives of the Congo and North and Central Africa. And what is even more ironic is that the natives haughtily refuse any inferior grade of stone; no topstone or wallstone for them, thank you kindly, but floorstone, the bottom layer and the best of the three, or nothing at all! So the knapper sits at home and fashions flints for those high-minded

simpletons on the other side of the world; if a big order comes in he can turn them out at the rate of two thousand a day, and they bring him about six shillings a thousand.

For many years the Edwardses have been the foremost family in knapping, and I believe that there are still five of them connected with it in one way or another. Not long ago Herbert, a master craftsman, gave a broadcast on his trade and actually knapped into the microphone. And it was an Edwards who took me one evening into the little workshop behind his cottage, and there gave me one of the most fascinating exhibitions of workmanship that I shall ever see.

Flints were heaped about the yard, but the scene without was as nothing compared to the inside of the shop. Here flints were piled high in the corners, strewn all over the floor, chips, quarters, halves and wholes; flints of every colour and quality, discarded flints, and flints as yet untested. It was a bewildering sight, the sea of flint which swamped that musty little room. And over everything, on the ledges, shelves, windows, on the walls themselves, lay a thick layer of white, chalky dust. Mr. Edwards coughed, a dry, harsh cough that was repeated again and again at short intervals. He told me that the chalky coating from the flint gets into the knapper's throat, plays tricks with his lungs, and eventually . . . yes, even that, sometimes. Just another drawback to being a flint-knapper.

Mr. Edwards tied a thick leather pad to his left knee, sat down on a stool, seized a big piece of untried flint in one hand and a blunt hammer in the other,

put the flint against the pad and with one blow knocked it into two perfect halves, their surfaces as smooth and black as polished ebony. These halves became halves in their turn, and that was the first process—quartering.

For the next, flaking, he took a pointed hammer and in about two minutes had reduced the entire flint into scores of chips. He worked so fast that I cannot tell you quite what did happen, although I watched him like a snake. He told me that flaking produces chips of different sizes with the bevelled topsides necessary for gun-flints. The bad ones were dumped on the floor, the good ones thrown into a basket. These he now removed to a solid slab of oak; in the middle of it was fixed a thin, narrow, upright tongue of iron, at the foot of which lay a thick square of hard leather, shaped like a piece of Turkish Delight. Mr. Edwards bound his right wrist very tightly and took yet another hammer, a thin, sharp one, made from an old chisel. He began the third and last process—knapping.

The hand which held the hammer was never still. Up and down it went, up and down, bounding and rebounding off the little block of leather, slowly at first, then faster and faster, like a piston in some smooth, faultless machine, while I stared until my head began to whirl. The other hand held the flints across the iron strip, turned them round and round, threw them out, groped for new ones; and all the while the hammer kept going like a bobbin, shaping them, sharpening them, moulding them as surely as any sculptor's chisel. Never have I seen anything so quick and accurate as that amazing work; it appeared to have

no intricacies at all, but to be perfectly simple, because of the speed and precise judgment with which those dozens of blows were delivered. One false stroke and the flint would have been ruined; but the knapper had the confidence, the sureness of touch and the speed of eye which are given only to the supreme and perfect craftsman. I suppose it was a little less than six minutes before that piece of uncut stone was reduced to a heap of gun-flints lying on the oak slab. Mr. Edwards stood up, unbound his wrist and presented me with gun-flints in four different sizes—musket, carbine, horse and single pistol.

I asked him if there was any hope for the future of knapping. He said no, when the natives ceased their demand for gun-flints, as they must surely do one day, then the trade would virtually be dead. Moreover, there was no one to succeed the five knappers, not one single apprentice. The old story. Young men with better things to do than waste their time on an obsolete job like that. Not that they'd have the concentration or the guts even to learn the work, let alone stick to it. Mr. Edwards remembered with a wry smile the days of his own apprenticeship: "If yew want your heart brook, that there'll break it," said he simply, and I believed him.

And so the five knappers of Brandon carry on, lonely workers in a lonely land, and the secrets of their art will die with them.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE RIVERS

THE more I see of Suffolk the more do I realize that she owes all the best part of her character to her rivers. It is the rivers that have fashioned the country and given it all its outward beauty; without them it would be bare, flat and monotonous.

It is extraordinary what a power the rivers have, and I think that very few people give them credit for it. The stranger probably isn't aware that Suffolk has any rivers worth speaking of; he may have heard vaguely of the Orwell, and if he has ever embarked at Harwich he can hardly have helped noticing the Stour. When he picks up the map he sees two more, the Deben and the Alde; beyond these there appears to be nothing at all. And yet there are rivers not only the whole way up the coast, but also right across the middle of the county and round the borders of it. Suffolk is really a network of rivers, whose existence the stranger does not even suspect until he almost falls into them; he may well search the map all day without finding half of them. To the inexperienced eye it would seem that even the four large rivers come to a stop after reaching their first towns; take a closer look and you will see that their further progress is marked by a thin black line like the one that crosses a temperature chart. By and by

another black line leads off from the first, and from that another, and from that yet another, until the river begins to look like a bare tree against a green field. These black lines are the rivers of Suffolk tapering away in an impenetrable maze all over the face of the country. Call them streams, if you like; but follow out even the smallest of them until it suddenly tapers off into nothing in the middle of a field, and I warrant that its capacity will astonish you. It will take you all your time to trace any of the Suffolk rivers to their sources: it is probable that in a very short while you will get irretrievably lost, and find yourself wandering off up one of those innumerable and bewildering tentacles that shoot out at every unlikely angle as if their one object was to reduce the traveller to a state of hopeless confusion.

I myself live on a river; it is the village drain. Judging by appearances it is about the most insignificant stream of all, having its source in four diminutive rivulets between Badingham and Ubbeston and pursuing a vague and muddled course to the sluice in Minsmere marshes; yet such is its effect on the countryside that its little valley is known far and wide as the Garden of Suffolk. Locally this river is treated as a grand joke. It is never referred to by its two official names, Yox and Min, which most of those who live in the Garden of Suffolk have never even heard of; in summer, when it cries its profession aloud on the dry, still air, we leave it well alone and call it "that darn drain"; and in winter, when the heavy rains send it swirling noisily over its banks, we gather beside it and exclaim in wonder: "The little ould stream's a runnin' well to-day, boy!" But whether dry and

stinking, or full and flourishing, the little old stream never loses its grip on its surroundings.

It is the same with all the rivers: each tributary, however small and absurd, has its own valley; each valley, however narrow, has its own characteristics. And one and all have the power of transforming the country through which they pass. I am convinced that it is the wealth of rivers which gives east Suffolk all its charm and variety, and that the high land of west Suffolk lacks these qualities simply because it lacks rivers, or rather because its streams are more widely separated and are by that time so far inland that they cannot be expected to maintain the same freshness and vigour with which they pervade the countryside nearer the coast. (Yes, I am quite aware that I am taking things the wrong way round, but I never have been able to get used to the idea that a river rises inland; I have always imagined it as flowing from the sea, and not into it.) The streams are responsible for the wild and lawless beauty of east Suffolk; it is because of them that the country is broken, irregular and delightfully untidy, that the hedges grow to such gargantuan sizes, that the trees are scattered and haphazard, that the fields are small and oddly shaped, and that the landscape holds some new surprise with every twist in the lane. For even the weakest and least pretentious stream causes a luxuriance which is astounding, and the narrower the valley becomes the more condensed and obvious is the water's influence; the fields that slope away from it are thick and green, whether with corn or with grass, while the trees in its neighbourhood, whatever sort they may be, seem to grow to twice their normal

size. And since the streams are so close together, you can imagine that there is very little of east Suffolk which does not come under their spell. It seems incredible that these exiguous trickles can have such range and such power; but, after all, it is not so very long ago that the Waveney was navigable to Bungay, the Blyth to Halesworth, and the Alde to Framlingham; and a further reason may be that the sea once extended so far into east Suffolk that the country was more water than land. I know that in the dim past an arm of the sea stretched right up to Brandon, for I remember a flint-knapper showing me some stones which, he said, were bruised in a way that could only have been caused by the sea buffeting them together. Moreover, I have heard that the ringed plover only nests on Breckland nowadays because his ancestors used to nest there in the times when the country was a shore of the sea, and by some strange instinct he still keeps to this habit after all these hundreds of years. Certainly the sea has not left many signs of fertility on Breckland itself; on the other hand, the borders of the Little Ouse have some of the best stretches of corn in the whole county.

Sea or no sea, these little rivers of east Suffolk (and of the west, where they occur) are the real charm of the countryside. Villages lying beside streams become at once more interesting and more attractive; each has its own type of bridge, each is planned in a different way—up and down the hill, in the flat of the valley, growing almost out of the water, or set well away on either side of it. I have never counted the number of river villages in Suffolk as compared to non-river ones, but I should guess that half at least

are connected with streams of some sort. And quite apart from the influence of the rivers on their villages and on the countryside around them, there are the ever-changing delights of the valleys themselves. Where the river is at its widest, near the sea, there are huge expanses of marsh on either side, intersected with woods and heaths coming down almost to the water's edge. As the river narrows, so the marshes narrow with it, until they give way to water-meadows and bright green pasture; then the woods close in upon the valley, the slopes become steeper, and the stream would lose itself entirely in the wildness of the country but for the poplars and willows that irregularly mark its course. It is here, in its infancy, that the river's power over the country can best be felt and seen; when it is at the height of its glory among the marshes and heaths it has no chance to produce a luxuriance of pasture, hedges or corn.

I can truthfully say that no two rivers of Suffolk are alike; even the Orwell and the Stour, which join together above Harwich before going into the sea, and which you would think must surely have more or less the same characteristics, need only the barest glance to show how different they really are. They curl round either side of a promontory; the Orwell has woods and parks and cliffs, the Stour has meadows and corn. After passing their respective towns they become even more unlike, for the Orwell has rather a narrow valley and uninspiring country, while the Stour preserves its bright water-meadows and a continual change of scenery to the very last.

The rivers have two other peculiarities. Firstly, to the discomfiture of visitors, some of them elect to change

their names at certain points in their career for no reason whatsoever. The Yox (our village drain) becomes the Min, the Alde suddenly turns into the Ore (there is some excuse for this, because the Alde and the Ore were once two separate rivers), while the Gipping flows under a bridge at Ipswich and comes out on the other side as the Orwell. The strangest transformation of all is that of the Little Ouse, which, after marking the northern boundary of Suffolk for about twenty-five miles, reaches a small village called Redgrave and promptly changes its name to Waveney; and then, in the north-east corner of the county, nothing but a small strip of Breydon Water prevents the Waveney from flowing into the Yare. Only those who have made a very detailed and difficult exploration know that the Waveney and the Little Ouse are not really one and the same river, as they appear to be on the map. Each has its own source in the same marsh, and the only thing that keeps them apart is a small road, banked up as if for that very purpose. And so this is perhaps not a true change of name, although the two must surely have been one continuous stream before that road was built.

The other oddity about our rivers is that they penetrate so far inland—or, more correctly, rise so far inland. The Deben and the Dove only just escape each other in the centre of the county; in the same way the Gipping misses by barely a couple of miles a noble stream which flows into the Little Ouse. This same river is distinguished by being the only one that cannot boast a name; as it runs for at least twenty miles it seems rather odd that nobody has ever bothered to give it one. Finally, the Stour, which is

the longest of them all and rises some distance inside Cambridgeshire, nearly clashes with the Kennett in the distant west. It is the length and spread of the rivers that make Suffolk a county of perpetual surprise.

The Stour, with its towns, villages and country, has already been honoured with a chapter of its own, and the Deben will be spoken of later in the book. I suppose that by rights I should now give the premier place to the Orwell and to Ipswich. Ipswich is the capital of the county, an estimable city, and as such I salute it. But Ipswich hardly contributes to the spirit of Suffolk as I know it, and for that reason I shall write of it very briefly. And I must confess that as a town of beauty it has many shortcomings: Colchester, Cambridge, Norwich, Lincoln—even its most devoted admirers will not say that it compares with any of these. New building has undoubtedly effaced its beauty to a great extent. Building on the outskirts of any large town is inevitable nowadays; but the tentacles of Ipswich seem to reach farther and to become more ungainly every year; and then Ipswich has been rebuilt internally, too, so that most of its fine old timbered houses have either been pulled down or else so woefully engulfed that they are now difficult to find.

Ipswich, by all accounts, was once a very lovely place; now it is fast losing the bulwark of its old romance—the pubs. For years its old pubs kept the spirit of the town very much to the fore; there were so many of them that Ipswich became known as the City of the Taverns—and grand old taverns they were, too, timbered and crooked, full of hidden, musty

corners, with the shadowy histories of smugglers lurking on the landlords' lips. But the days are gone when as many as half a dozen old pubs could be found in one street, and I believe that more than thirty have been pulled down in the last two years alone to make room for the usual buildings that seem to be indispensable in these days. I heard one disconsolate landlord lay the blame on women. "The Wimmun," said he, "they on't care what a pub look like outside nor yet what that look like inside, so long as thass got all mander o' cocktails an' things that'd start a deadrot in the guts of a elliphant. Beer? They on't drink na beer, cause that swells their blessed little stummicks so they think. Thass the wimmun thass wholly the ruen o' the pubs, an' thass what I said they niver ought to hev bin allowed in 'em in the fust place." Women or no women, the ancient pubs are going; but I hope the day will never come when the only one left will be the Great White Horse, in which Mr. Pickwick had some of his choicest adventures.

Ipswich, however, still has two buildings which are almost world-famous. One is a fantastic Elizabethan place called Sparrowe's House or the Ancient House, which is carved and ornamented in such a way as to make you rub your eyes. The basement front is a sort of orchard in oak, being covered with a profusion of elaborate leaves and flowers; and nearly the whole way round the edge of the roof runs a promenade wide enough to walk on. But the strangest part of this house, outside or inside, are the five huge bay windows, with figures on their bases carved to represent (though you would never guess it from looking at them) America, Asia, Africa, Europe, and finally an

uncouth, bearded Atlas groaning beneath the weight of his globe.

The other building of which Ipswich has good reason to be proud is Wolsey's Gate; whether the town should be proud of Wolsey himself is a matter of opinion. Who was he? Some say he was nothing better than a butcher's son, others that he was the son of a grazier—a very different matter—or of a well-to-do burgess, while it is even possible that his father was some noble prince who succeeded in keeping his indiscretion quiet. Whoever Wolsey was, and whatever his faults, Ipswich should be grateful to him, for he was in the act of doing his native town a great service when disaster swept him from his pedestal. Having raised his funds by suppressing St. Peter's Priory at Ipswich, and some dozen others in the neighbourhood as well, he set about building on its site a fine College from which he intended to supply the scholars for his even grander College of Christ Church at Oxford. And then in 1530 disgrace fell upon the mighty Cardinal, and the life of the Ipswich College came to an abrupt end almost before it had begun. If the long-headed Wolsey, who has been called the greatest political genius that England ever produced and who was quite clever enough to foresee his own fall, intended that it should remain as a lasting memorial to his virtues, then he miscalculated sadly. Every trace of the College itself, which extended over six acres of ground, has vanished: all that is left is a gateway, and that not even the main one. It is simply an archway built of brick, surmounted by a square hood and the crumbling arms of Henry VIII; and, incidentally, it does not look to me to be any too

secure. But you need not go to Ipswich to see Wolsey's Gate; you can see it on the labels of any of Messrs. Cobbold's beer bottles.

From Ipswich docks the Orwell, which has a gentle, placid beauty quite foreign to the other Suffolk rivers, begins its long journey seawards. But the Orwell is too popular (and populous) for my purpose, and the rivers that I have chosen are those which I know best and which, to my mind, have some of the loveliest of the Suffolk country.

The Alde is my favourite river, for on it and around it the best years of my life were spent. But before I come to the lower reaches, I must tell you of a certain place that lies about twelve miles from the coast.

Near the head of the Alde there is a town with old, narrow streets, pink and white cottages, and a grand church, half hidden by trees, overlooking the little market-place. It is Framlingham, the finest small town in east Suffolk; for two reasons, and despite what I said in the last chapter, I am almost inclined to put it above Melford, Lavenham and Clare. Firstly, it lies in a strip of country which has all the qualities that are the essence of Suffolk; secondly, it has a castle.

This castle stands on high ground directly above the Alde, now only a small stream, but once navigable as far as the town. Clare is as nothing beside it, nor Burgh, nor yet Wingfield. Not only is it by far the most magnificent castle in this county, but also, as a ruin, nearly the best in all England; if only the hill on which it stands were just a shade higher, then there would be no question about its supremacy.

I think I would rather see a good castle, ruined or

preserved, than the most stately church in the land; in a castle there is such endless range for the imagination. I like to wander around it for hours, not piecing it together architecturally, but tracing its life stage by stage, comparing the different people who possessed it, guessing at what their thoughts must have been, almost seeing them where I stand and listening to them woo, curse, laugh or weep. At Framlingham I could pass the rest of my life in these dim imaginings and never reach the end of them before I died, for the story of the castle is as strange as that of the greatest historical romance ever written. The facts of it have already been given in so many books that there is no need for me to go into them in detail; but to bring the castle to life I must tell you something of its amazing past.

The original castle is believed to have been Saxon, built by Redwald, King of East Anglia, in the seventh century, and tradition says that it was here the wretched Edmund made his last stand whilst being harried by the Danes. At any rate, there was a castle at Framlingham before the Conquest, and such a strong one that neither William nor Rufus was willing to part with it. But Henry I, currying favour, gave it to a family who held it for more than two hundred years, a family most appropriately named Bigod.

These Bigods, Earls of Norfolk, were about the toughest brood ever hatched in England. The English kings must have looked upon them as nothing less than nightmares. For all their faults, their avarice and their double dealings, they appear now as a romantic lot of ruffians, for they certainly had courage and an astonishing insolence. From the first they

started making trouble. Hugh Bigod, having put King Stephen on the throne almost by his own efforts, promptly turned upon him, deciding that Princess Maude was more to his taste as a sovereign, and plunged the country into bloodshed and civil war—taking good care to see that he came out of it with a profit. For this piece of devilry Henry II seized and despoiled Framlingham castle, later giving it back and making friends with Bigod in the interests of his own safety, for the Baron was now one of the most powerful men in the land. The treacherous Hugh then turned against the King, housing at Framlingham the Flemish army which the Earl of Leicester had brought over to attack Henry, and inciting the Princes to a rebellion which ended disastrously in the battle of Fornham St. Genevieve, a little village near Bury. He escaped, was deprived once more of his castles and chased out of the land by the jealous Barons. The whole of England was against him; his strength was a danger to the country. Back again came this indomitable rogue, this time to plunder Norwich. At last Henry himself raised an army and marched upon him at Framlingham. The odds were too great; Hugh looked upon the host without his walls and cried: "Were I in my Castle of Bungay, upon the waters of Waveneye, I would ne care for the King of Cockneye!" He gave up the castle without a fight, went off on a Crusade, and later came back to die a peaceful death in his old age.

An astonishing fellow—greedy, treacherous, utterly without fear. And the Bigods that came after him were as fierce and fiery as he. They treated their Kings exactly as it suited them; they cared not a curse

for the army or authority of a mere sovereign. Roger Bigod was one of those who brought King John to bay at Runnymede, for which indignity the King afterwards revenged himself by taking his army to Framlingham and seizing the castle. Then there was that Roger, Earl Marshal of England, who had a frightful quarrel with Henry III and, secure in the now almost impregnable castle—the Bigods had spent a great deal of time rebuilding it and adding to its strength—actually dared his Monarch to come down and do his worst—a challenge which Henry did not accept. Finally, there came yet another Roger, who refused point-blank to serve in Edward I's army abroad. “By the eternal God, you shall either march or be hanged!” cried the King. “By the eternal God, I will neither march nor be hanged!” replied the savage Bigod, and Edward retired abashed. How Edward must have rejoiced when this Roger, the last of the Bigods, died, having first made over the castle to the King to ensure, it is said, that his own brother should not get it!

So the Bigods passed away for ever, having reduced the whole country at various times to a state of turmoil; England was a happier place without them, but the history of Framlingham continued with never a dull moment. It went to the Mowbrays and the Howards, Dukes of Norfolk. The first Mowbray was exiled, the third was arrested by a trick when in arms against Henry IV and beheaded for high treason with Richard Scrope, Archbishop of York, in 1405. From the fourth Duke of Norfolk it passed to Lady Anne Mowbray, who was married, at the age of three, to the five-year-old Duke of York, one of the Princes murdered in the Tower.

Then came the Howards, Dukes of Norfolk in their turn. John Howard was killed at Bosworth, Thomas led the English army to victory at Flodden Field. When he died in 1524 he was given a national funeral, and with glorious pomp a procession bore his body from Framlingham to Thetford. The third Duke of Norfolk was the father of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, the greatest poet of his age, one of the first to practise the sonnet and actually the originator of blank verse. Having presented Henry VIII with his niece Catherine, in order to further his own designs, the Duke soon found himself in difficulties, for when Catherine was executed, he and his son fell from favour as well. Five years later they were both condemned for high treason and Surrey, the chivalrous, loyal and romantic, was beheaded, in spite of a complete lack of evidence against him; his father escaped because Henry VIII died during the few hours that were to elapse between the two executions. Surrey's memory is alive for ever, and among the Howard tombs in Framlingham church his is the finest of all—an exquisite thing of alabaster, beautifully wrought and painted. On top of it the spotless effigies of the poet and his lady lie peacefully side by side, and at either end their sons and daughters kneel in prayer.

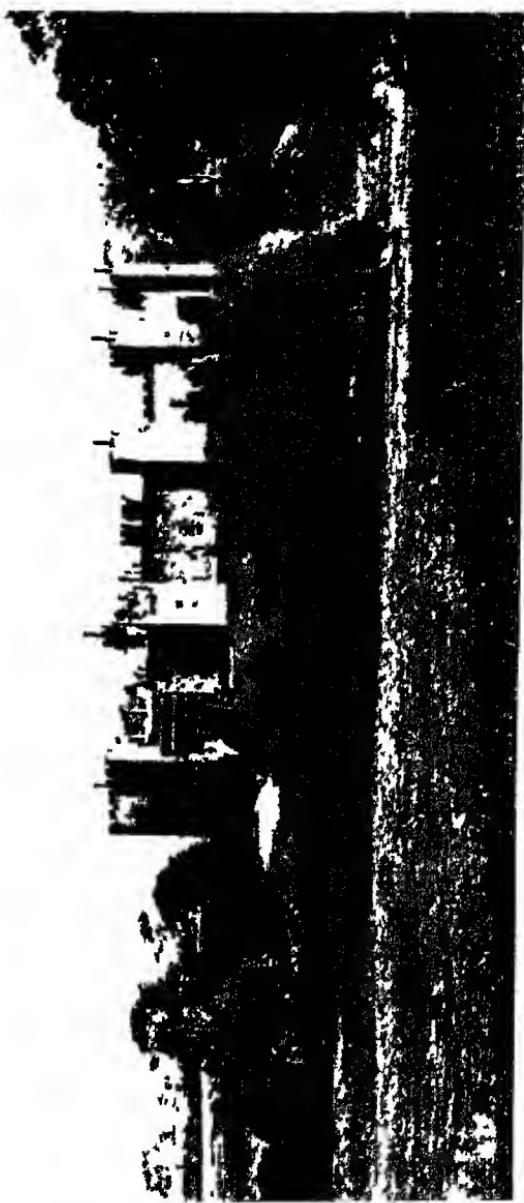
On and off the Howards held the castle until early in the seventeenth century. Often they fell into disgrace: one of them was beheaded by Elizabeth for intriguing with Mary Queen of Scots, whom he wished to marry, and for his complicity in the Ridolfi plot; another was imprisoned by her until he died of a broken spirit. At such times the castle reverted to the crown, but it always came back to

the family when the Queen's anger had died away.

Arundel was really the undoing of Framlingham; when, towards the end of the sixteenth century, the Howards got the lovely Sussex castle, their interest in Framlingham began to wane. In 1635 they sold it to a lawyer, Sir Robert Hitcham, who left it to Pembroke College, Cambridge, with the direction that at his death the whole of the interior was to be pulled down and the material used to build workhouses and alms-houses.

But the most amazing time in all Framlingham's history, more tremendous even than the sieges of Hugh Bigod or the grand funeral of the victor of Flodden Field, was the visit of Bloody Mary in 1553. Having just escaped from Sawston Hall in Cambridge in the guise of an old market woman, the Princess came to Framlingham to rally her standard against the unfortunate Jane Grey. The whole of Suffolk was in a whirl; earls, knights, sailors, countrymen, from all over the Eastern Counties they flocked into Framlingham to join her. So great was their enthusiasm that in a few days the gloating Mary had more than thirteen thousand men encamped about the castle walls, and after a bare fortnight she was able to set out on her triumphal march to London, with the sturdy East Anglians trooping behind her, swearing blood and murder in the cause of their liege. But after Mary's death a most unsavoury tradition arose about that brief visit of hers: the people of Framlingham declared that in her room in the castle she had given birth to a horrible abortion, a sub-human monster, whose brains, if any, she had brutally dashed out against a stone.

Can you wonder now that I delight in wandering



#### FRAMLINGHAM CASTLE

C. de Paula

With such a story behind it of death and defeat, of courage and glory, no place could ever surrender its spirit until it disappeared under the ground



about those castle grounds? With such a story behind it of death and defeat, of courage and glory, no place could ever surrender its spirit until it disappeared under the ground. It is no gentle, dreamy spirit, this; the old walls of Framlingham are aglow with the hot fires that raged about them for a thousand years; it is a strong place, vivid and fierce, as unrelenting in its old age as were the Bigods themselves. They built the castle to withstand the onslaughts of the whole of England, if need be; and when they died, they left their character stamped upon its walls.

Perhaps what strikes you most about it is that it looks so tremendously solid. From outside it seems hardly less massive than Windsor itself; yet it is only a shell, a perfect and complete shell, but hollow as a blown egg. Hitcham's will was well carried out; in 1656 the castle was gutted from end to end, and only its walls have remained standing for the last three hundred years. And why *did* Hitcham make that extraordinary condition? I cannot believe that he was such a rabid philanthropist as to destroy a whole castle simply to provide a few houses for the poor. I have heard it suggested that the Scottish James, with the defeat of Flodden Field still stinging his country's pride, gave Hitcham the £14,000 with which he bought the castle on the understanding that the hated Norfolks' stronghold should be degraded for ever.

So there is Hitcham's workhouse, with its kitchen, built against the inside of one of the walls; in the town is another almshouse, still in use, which was also built partly with the castle stone. And for many reasons I am glad that the castle was destroyed in this way; whatever Hitcham may have done to it, he did nothing

to impair its spirit; in fact, by ruining it, he preserved and enhanced the essence of it for ever. A building must always be stronger, prouder and more appealing when it has suffered, when an attempt to efface its glory has failed. There is majesty and dignity, but no wild, battered heroism, about Arundel; but the whole life of Framlingham, its wars and its peace, its troubles and its joys, is written on those scarred walls and crumbling turrets. Supposing there is a yacht race, and the winner finishes smoothly, elegant and unruffled—she gets a cheer. But when another boat comes in, with her rigging torn away and her canvas ripped to shreds, then, no matter if she finishes last of all, the cheering is fifty times as loud. Thus it is with Framlingham compared to others.

I love this castle above any other building in the county. I love to idle about the wide green lawn inside it and to wander round the top of the walls; here I think of Hugh Bigod cursing as he watched the dense ranks of the King's army swarming up the narrow valley of the Alde, and of the wistful Surrey gazing hour after hour into the weedy depths of the moat below him. I have seen Framlingham on Fair Day, too; standing on the castle wall, I have looked down upon the booths and wagons stretched like a bright, straggling quilt across the meadow beyond the moat—the meadow where the shields and banners of Bloody Mary's Suffolk army flashed in the sunlight of a summer morning four hundred years ago. A different Fair to Melford. No gipsies here, no horses—though we do have pony-races round the top of the moat—no brawls and dancing, but a more sober crowd, a gay, delighted one, intent only on the hundred amusements

that are the same year after year, and yet are always different. This is one of the oldest Fairs in the county; a charter for it was granted to Thomas de Brotherton by Edward II, his half-brother, in 1312, and the Fair has been held at Framlingham ever since. Only one gap can I remember, and that was in 1937, when the expenses of the Coronation festivities were too heavy to allow the town to hold the Fair as well.

I said farther back that the country around Framlingham had all the qualities which I like best. Near Little Glemham the Alde splits up into two branches, one of which goes through Great Glemham, Swefling, Rendham, Bruisyard and Badingham, finally petering out (or rising) only a mile or so from the source of our own village drain; the other through Marlesford, Parham, Framlingham, and on to Saxtead. The strip between these two branches is criss-crossed with little streams, and it is here that the trees are taller and thicker, the slopes more green and more luxuriant than anywhere else in Suffolk. The villages along the valleys are small and sheltered, the country is quiet and deserted; it has a wildness that is rich, protected, almost soothing, quite different in its effect from that of the high plateaus towards the Waveney. In some places you can take a standing jump over the branches of the Alde; in summer I have seen them so dry that as streams they have ceased to exist at all, and in winter I have seen them rise and spread themselves across their valleys; but, no matter what state they are in, the country between them has a distinct and gentle beauty of its own.

What shall I tell you of the Alde? I know it all

(F 668)

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so well, every bend, every landmark, every marsh, every creek; I know every fisherman that sails it, every wildfowler that shoots it. I could tell you exactly how to find those few strips of mud that are the only ones in the whole river which will not swallow you alive in less than a minute; I could tell you where to look for redshanks' and plovers' nests, which are the best salttings for snipe, how to get to the teals' favourite ponds at high tide, how to approach the heronry and where you will be most likely to see the oyster-catchers feeding. I could tell you all this and a thousand other things until I had no space left for anything else. Most of my early life was bound up with the Alde; I spent my days and nights walking by it, swimming in it, sailing on it, sleeping on it, shooting in its salttings, poaching in its marshes. My life then was just one grand adventure on that river; I could find my way blindfold across the marshes, or row a punt in pitch darkness from the top of the narrowest creek to the moorings at Slaughden Quay. I have written many stories and diaries of it; but to write a sober description of it is impossible.

When I think of the Alde I can see the whole shape of it from Snape bridge to the bar at Shingle Street. It is an eccentric shape, rather like a snake in the act of turning round to bite its own tail. Before reaching Slaughden Quay it runs almost spirally; then it suddenly changes its name, twists right round, nearly doubling on its tracks, and straightens out beside the coast. But it can never keep straight for long; it winds broadly through the marshes, takes in a long island, sends off another river through Butley, and finally, getting nearer and nearer to the sea, washes

over the bar into Hollesley Bay. The loveliest part of the whole river is at Iken, where the church and rectory stand lonely on a little wooded hill at the head of the bay that curves sharply back beneath bracken and oak trees and steep, sandy cliffs. There is something very restful about this place, very old and very friendly; there is no church in England which gives you in quite the same way such a feeling of security and changelessness. Behind it are fields, woods and heaths stretching down to Orford, to the right of it are the marshes and the distant sea. A huge expanse of river lies before you when you lean over the graveyard wall; the long, dark pine wood of Blackheath and the bay in the corner where widgeon gather in thousands on winter nights, seem at least two miles off; but wait till low tide and you will see the whole river fall away until it becomes a flat, shining ocean of mud with the channel a thin thread through the middle of it. Whimbrel, curlew, redshank, dunlin, shelduck, mallard, all the birds of the river come up to feed around Iken flats, and their din sets the tame duck quacking raucously in the decoy at the back of the marshes. The noise of birds is all that you will hear at Iken, except when the east wind drives across the marsh and lashes at the thatch of the church. When I was a child I decided that here was the place for me to be buried. I have not altered my mind. Everyone wants to lie in his own country: this is mine. I shall feel safe if I have the scream of the birds and the moan of the wind and the lapping of the water all round me, and the lonely woods and marshes that I know so well. How can anyone say what he will feel when he is dead? What I mean is that I shall feel secure in dying.

Several times I nearly came to my burial place a long while before I meant to, for never a week passed without my getting into some sort of trouble on the river. There was that evening when my brother and I, arriving rather late for the flight, rowed off from the jetty and recklessly beached our punt at the foot of the mud on the other side of the river, instead of going up the creek behind Stanney Point. Heaving and staggering, we began to plough our way up the mud, and when my brother took it into his head to turn round and tell me to hurry up, he was horrified to see me in the act of disappearing—from the waist downwards I didn't exist. I was sinking before his eyes like the periscope of a submarine, and in another thirty seconds there would not have been a sign of me, for the mud would have closed over my head as quickly as water itself. I was so numb with fright that I couldn't utter a sound. He shouted: "Throw yourself on your gun! Throw yourself on your gun!" Thank heaven I still had wits enough to do so. There was not much of me above ground, but what there was I flung forward as far as I could, contriving just in time to pull the gun back under my armpits; even then I felt myself going, felt my head and shoulders being pulled slowly back by the weight of my body. If I had lifted my arms or my head for an instant I should have gone under straight away. My brother threw himself flat on his stomach and came slithering back over the mud as fast as he could; he reached me, took me under the arms and tried to pull. But he could get no leverage; instead of his lifting me up, I began to drag him down. If he had stood up, he would probably have sunk just



#### THE ALDE AT IKEN

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raucously in the decoy at the back of the marshes

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as I had; the most he could do was to raise himself slightly on to his knees, and no man on earth could have moved me in that position. We looked into each other's eyes, and I have never forgotten the grin that he gave me. He told me afterwards that at that moment he thought there was not the slightest hope of saving me, because he could not let me go to reach the punt and cut the painter; by the time he had got back there would have been nothing left to tie it to. Somehow he wriggled forward under my right arm, lying flat and pushing himself against me until his body was curled round me in a semicircle. I leaned across him and gripped his calves; then I began to heave. At first I could not move an inch: I seemed to have sunk farther than ever. I reached forward as best I could, I dug my elbows into his thighs and even, I think, seized the seat of his trousers between my teeth—anything to get a grip, to pull myself forward. I began to come up; I came so slowly that I did not even know I had moved until I found that I could touch his ankles, and then I was still too paralysed for any feelings of relief. All this while he never spoke a word, though he must have been in agony; and not only in agony, but in very great danger, too. He had to lie with his face buried in the sleeve of his coat to prevent himself being suffocated by mud. How long it took I don't know—probably not more than five minutes passed from the time when I began to sink until we lay side by side on the mud, gasping, shaking, without an atom of strength left in either of us, while the yawning hole that had engulfed me gurgled up beneath us. When at last we began to crawl towards the punt we left nothing but a few

scratches and scars on the surface of the mud; of the hole itself there was not a trace, just as there would have been no trace of me if my brother had turned round half a minute later than he did. There was no wildfowling for us that night; we staggered home looking like a couple of Trolls that had been through a rough time at the bottom of the river. We were always having our lives saved in those days, either by each other or by fishermen and fowlers. We should have been killed in a score of different ways.

These disturbing episodes were often so comic that a couple of hours later our appropriate solemnity and thanksgiving had changed to the most irreverent laughter. The choicest of our adventures occurred while sailing.

We were still very young when we decided that we needed something altogether more thrilling and more presentable than the slow, shabby old converted beach-boat which served us faithfully on our wildfowling expeditions, but which could hardly be classed among the aristocrats of the river. By dint of leading a hermit's life it was not long before we had saved enough money to buy a couple of dinghies, and accordingly we commissioned one of the Woodbridge firms to build them for us. My brother's was ready first, a shining, dapper little thing with a lug sail, and she at once became the pride and pleasure of our inexperienced lives. Now, a twelve-foot dinghy is a difficult and treacherous boat to handle, as many people have found to their cost. Little did that worry us; we named her *Mrs. Quickly*, although we did not credit her with one half of that good lady's guile, and embarked without a qualm to solve whatever trifling mysteries she had

to offer. As an old fisherman scathingly remarked when he watched us setting off on our first trip, we knew as much about the sailing of her as a pig knows about Bank Holiday.

One morning, when *Mrs. Quickly* was about a week old, we left Slaughden Quay for Barber's Point, intending to run the boat up the creek and make a surreptitious reconnaissance of the decoy in the marshes. This was a favourite practice of ours, for by paying a visit to the decoy towards the end of July we could gauge quite accurately what kind of sport we were to expect on the first of August; this time, however, our interest was purely academic, for we wished to find out how many native birds used the decoy as a breeding-ground in the spring. We set out with a fresh, following wind, and *Mrs. Quickly* skimmed over the water almost as lightly as the flocks of dunlin—I remember that they were very late in leaving us that year—which wheeled from point to point along the river. In a very short while we came to the top of the reach known as West Row, and it was here that we passed Old Sam Board, a fisherman of some seventy-five industrious years, engaged in the traditional sport of pritching for eels. The tide was flooding fast, and Old Sam had moored his battered rowing-boat in a snug little bight under the lee of the salttings, no doubt above some hallowed piece of mud which was known only to him and to the eels. Old Sam knew more about the eels' feeding-grounds in the Alde than did the eels themselves. He was the bogey of every young eel in the river; hour by hour he waylaid them, motionless as a sleeping bat, except for the spasmodic darting of his pritcher, until at last the falling tide forced him to

change his grounds. When things were going badly he baited the grounds with some concoction of his own. In catching his eels he used much the same technique as the heron does; the heron's beak acts as a spear, while Sam's pritcher, which looked like a fan-shaped toasting-fork, secured an eel by wedging it tightly between two of the four broad prongs. Apart from this, Old Sam was a heron to the life, sitting hunched up, scraggy and forlorn, his eyes fixed intently on the mud, his pritcher poised ready for the strike.

"Morning, Sam!" we shouted. He peered at us dimly through his cracked, rusty spectacles, waved his pritcher in a non-committal way, and returned to the job. Old Sam hated being disturbed. We smiled and sped on towards the brick-dock jetty.

At the rate we were going we should reach the creek sooner than we had intended, and as we were anxious not to approach the decoy until dinner-time, when the keeper, an old enemy of ours, who would most certainly misunderstand the motives of our visit, would be out of the way, we decided to cruise around for a while. We therefore put *Mrs. Quickly* about.

At least, we put her half about. Exactly what happened I don't know, but she suddenly heeled over and began to fill with water. If she had been a barrel with the bottom out she couldn't have filled more quickly. For a second or two we watched in astonishment, and then I shouted "Jump!"—and as we jumped, or flopped as far as we could, like walruses rolling off a rock, *Mrs. Quickly* turned turtle. Had we stayed, we should probably have been trapped underneath her, and that would have been the end of us. As it was, we were lucky enough to escape being

entangled by either the sail or the rigging; but our relief at being able to tread water freely was as nothing to the dismay caused by the sight of *Mrs. Quickly's* burnished and expansive bottom drifting blissfully down the river towards heaven knew what pitfalls and disasters. We swam after her, caught her up, held on to her as best we could and strove to keep her in the middle of the channel. We then shook the water out of our eyes and scanned the river for some means of assistance.

The Alde appeared to be as void as a desert. Not a sail was in sight, not even a punt was moving on the broad waters; we were alone, and likely to remain so until some enlightened person should decide, as we had done, that this was just the morning for a cruise. And then my eye fell on Old Sam Board, tucked away in his bight, his pritcher still held at the ready, like a javelin-thrower sitting for a portrait. He seemed to have noticed nothing of our mishap: probably he had forgotten that he had ever seen us.

"Hey! Sam! Sam!" I yelled, causing my brother to loose his precarious hold and disappear under the water. My shout went echoing down the river, and a quarter of a mile away Old Sam slowly raised his head; he peered this way, he peered that way, and finally he peered our way. But not for long. One disinterested glance and with a violent, downward motion of his pritcher he set about regaining his concentration on the business in hand.

We were downright flabbergasted. A dreadful suspicion came into our minds. "He can't have seen us," my brother muttered, without much conviction. Cupping our mouths as well as we could with

one hand, we roared in concert. Gulls and cormorants rose hurriedly off the water at the other end of the reach, the dunlins tripping about the shore stood still and gazed at us reproachfully—but Old Sam Board never so much as raised his eyes from that little patch of mud. Our suspicion became a certainty.

At first we bawled continuously; then the intervals began to grow longer, our voices weaker and weaker, and gradually we gave it up altogether. We were getting cold: our faces were blue, our fingers numb. The tide was running swiftly; it was all we could do to maintain a slippery grip on *Mrs. Quickly's* broad bottom, let alone keep her in the channel and hold her against the tide. With a kind of unwilling fascination we watched Old Sam. He was evidently having a real Field Day; every few minutes the pritcher darted downwards, breaking the water with scarcely a ripple, and four times out of five it came up with a fat eel wriggling on the end of it. Then Sam threw in a piece of bait and waited tensely for the next victim. Not by one glance or gesture did he betray his knowledge of our plight.

Things were getting serious. "For God's sake let's leave the boat and get ashore while we can!" I said. But my brother refused to move. "This wind will drive her on shore and she may smash her mast and tear her sail to glory," said he. "We *can't* leave her." But we couldn't hang on much longer; pretty soon it would be a question of *Mrs. Quickly* or ourselves.

And then in the distance—for with all our striving the tide was moving us farther and farther away—Old Sam hauled up a monster eel, banged it on the head and at last, still without a glance in our direction,

picked up his oars. We sent up a mighty shout of joy; but soon my brother spluttered: "Why the devil can't he hurry up?" Slowly, slowly, came Old Sam, like Arthur putting off in his barge, now drifting with the tide, now paddling a few strokes as if in a dream. The minutes dragged like hours, Old Sam floated gradually nearer, and all at once he stood up in the prow, shook both his fists at us, and told us in a score of richly worded East Anglian sentences just what he thought of ungrammatically swell-headed boys who went out in inexpressible dinghies and got themselves thrown into the unrepeatable water. We let him exhaust himself, and then together we gave him our opinion of selfish, dithering old fishermen who spent their days mucking about after indescribable eels. That conversation is best left in the soothing waters of the Alde; Old Sam clinched it by saying: "Them eels carn't wait, yew bars tids can!"—whereupon we seized hold of his boat and clambered on board.

Having thumped the life back into our numbed bodies, we attempted to right *Mrs. Quickly*, failed, and so fixed her as she was to Sam's painter. We then almost threw Old Sam into the stern, seized the oars and began to row as if pursued by a shark. "Hey! where d'yew think yew're a goin'?" shouted the indignant Sam. "Shut up!" we said shortly, and the old man subsided with twitching fingers and a desperate rage glittering in his filmy eyes. You can imagine that the going was pretty hard; fortunately the tide was then almost slack, but our progress was about equal to that of a flounder swimming backwards. Not another word did we speak until we came to Slaughden Quay, where two fishermen took charge of *Mrs. Quickly*.

Exhausted, we disentangled ourselves from the eels and climbed ashore, sending Sam and his boat spinning out into the middle of the river and shouting bitterly that we would recommend him to the R.N.L.I. for their first-class medal. We did not wait to hear his reply; the last we saw of him, he was pulling wearily towards his fishing-grounds, and we realized with a spasm of delight that the tide had now changed and that he was facing a nice long row against the ebb.

Barely a fortnight after this we got word that my own boat was ready, and early the next morning I took the train to Woodbridge, accompanied by a fisherman called Harry, the hero of my youth and one of the finest men I ever knew. We looked forward to a fine day's sailing, intending to take the dinghy down the Deben, along the sea under Bawdsey cliffs and Alderton, and so up the Alde (or rather, the Ore) and home to Slaughden. I was so excited that I had accidentally come out in my thigh-boots, which Harry considered such a prime joke that he laughed over it the whole way to Woodbridge.

It was a day of gusty winds, of blue skies chequered with wisps of racing cloud; the new boat dipped and darted through the water like a frisky porpoise, and Harry and I were as gay as larks. I must leave to your imagination those long tacks down the lovely Deben, past woods and marshes and heaths, while I sang songs and Harry gave forth a stream of his choicest stories. The miles of river slipped past us until we came out into the sea and cruised before the wind to the bar at the mouth of the Alde, which, Harry being a strong and skilful pilot, we navigated with little difficulty.

We reached Havergate Island at about half-past

two, just as the tide turned from flood to ebb. With a following wind this worried us not at all, and we moved at a fine rate until suddenly, without a puff of warning, the breeze fell right away. The sail went slack, a hush came over the river and the marshes. Away behind us the sky had grown dark and ominous. Harry whistled a hopeful tune, but not a breath could he stir out of the lifeless air. "Oh dearie me," said he, looking at the bank in dismay, "this 'ere on't dew at all, we're a goin' backards now I dew believe." We waited a few moments, but it seemed that the wind had gone for good. "Oh well, less tie up against the island awhile an' hoop that'll come agen, that ain't no good us a stickin' about out 'ere, chum, dew \* we's'll find usselves back on the little ould bar," announced Harry with a sigh; so we ran the boat up to the bank and went ashore, I having first put on my thigh-boots, which Harry had persuaded me to discard when we left Woodbridge.

We wandered disconsolately about Havergate Island, a bleak, deserted strip of marsh. We inspected the ramshackle shepherd's cottage, we watched the hares, which were then in the last stages of their March madness, racing wildly to and fro as if a couple of human beings in their midst were no more to be feared than scarecrows, and idly we remarked that they must

\* I must explain about that "dew" (in plain English, "do") which a Suffolk man uses in every other sentence and which will occur many times throughout this book. It means "if you do", "if you don't", "otherwise", "or else", &c., and can be used in any tense and for any person of that tense—e.g. "Put that dog out, do (i.e. 'if you don't', 'or else') that'll cry all night." "Take this home to Momma, do (i.e. 'if you do') I'll give you a sweet." "He ran like a hare, do (i.e. 'if he hadn't done so') he wouldn't have got home in time." "They won't meet, do (i.e. 'if they should do') they won't hurt each other." A most elastic word, and one that bewilders every stranger to the county.

be brave swimmers ever to have reached the island at all. And as we stood on the bank there came a hissing across the water, the wind whipped up and a few drops of rain slanted down from the heavy clouds that were spreading over us from the south. "Here she come, then!" shouted Harry, and we rushed for the boat. But scarcely had we reached the middle of the channel when the wind and the rain died away, and only a sinister yellow light hung over the river to warn us that they would return more violent than before. That light is the surest sign of all; it should have satisfied us; but no, we had already wasted too much of the afternoon and had grown tired of drifting with the ebb in the wrong direction. We were thoroughly impatient.

"Sit yew in the starn, chum, an' let me tek the oors, dew we sharn't git the ould boot hoom to-day," commanded Harry, and I lounged back and held the swinging sheet while he sent the boat forward with strong, easy pulls.

Of course, it was sheer lunacy. Harry never could stand any form of inaction, that was the trouble of it; but even so, there was a tense, angry feeling in the atmosphere that should have warned us as clearly as the lighthouse at Orford Ness. We took not the least notice of it; the thought never crossed our minds that the most ignorant yachtsman in the river might have seen something slightly imprudent in what we were doing. Harry had taken perhaps half a dozen strokes when the wind came rushing crazily over the water, striking us with the suddenness of a blow from an unseen hand. We had not a second to prepare for it; as Harry said afterwards, the boom gybed

"quicker'n it takes for a monkey to scratch hisself". There was no question of jumping this time: one moment I was lolling in the stern with the tiller tucked comfortably under my arm, and the next I was struggling towards the surface fifteen feet away. By the time I had collected my wits the boat, lying on her side, was out of reach and drifting fast, with the wind, which had shifted its quarter completely, helping the tide to drive her beyond recovery.

To look at Harry you would have thought that being flung out of a boat was part of some splendid game. He bobbed up and down with the happy expression of a sea-lion expecting fish, brushed the long, curly hair away from his eyes and gave such a joyful grin that he almost lost the pipe which he still clutched between his teeth. This seemed to remind him that there were more comfortable places than the Alde on a cold April day; shifting his pipe to the other side of his mouth, he cried in a cheerful voice: "Hup-la, me bonny sailor-boy! Swim for the shoor, chum, that ain't above fifty yard." Easier said than done. I gave one kick with my legs and made a frightful discovery. I still had my thigh-boots on.

Have you ever tried swimming in thigh-boots? I shouldn't. It feels as if both your legs were encased in heavy sheets of lead, with a couple of large weights tied round your feet just to ensure a perfect balance. To arrange yourself in anything like a horizontal position is impossible: you seem to be dragging the whole river up with you. I doubt whether the strongest swimmer in East Anglia could have managed more than a dozen kicks in the sort of bathing-dress that I was wearing. I tried two or three and speedily returned

to the vertical, after which I concentrated on remaining above water and keeping my head, both of which became increasingly difficult. The despairing wail which I sent up brought Harry, now half-way to the shore, careering back with an unorthodox stroke of his own which he only used on special occasions.

Was he worried? Not in the slightest. "I ain't no life-saver, but that on't tek long to git yew hoom," said he with a laugh, as if this was still part of the game. Gripping his water-logged pipe yet more firmly than before, he made soothing noises in my ear as he swivelled me round and seized me under the arms from behind.

Harry swam on his back, and he kept up a sort of running commentary on our journey. As I was more or less under water for most of the way, I missed half of what he said, but in between my duckings I heard something like this: "Down yew go agen, pore ould boy, whoop-sie! up yew come. Now on't yew go a chokin' yerself, chum, yew let that lot come out, thass better outside'n in. Ha! ha! your guts must be as salt as a barrel o' herrens. Whoo-hoop! 'ere come another 'un! Lie yew still, chum, yew've a got to go down, that ain't no use fer yew to struggle, dew yew'll have me down tew. That on't hart yew, yew'll come up agen werry sune. Oh dearie me, your little ould mawther'll have suthen to say to mc, she'll say 'Whoi, Harra, yew gret fule,' she'll say, 'whass this 'ere yew've brot me hoom, whass the use of a son thass drowned like a clump o' seaweed?' On't yew start to holler, chum, yew keep your mouth shut, cause 'ere come another big 'un an yew're a goin' under agen."

The waves whose passage Harry so gloatingly recorded came fiercer and faster as the fury of the squall increased. The rain spat evilly on the water, the wind screamed in our ears, while life itself became something numb and cold and remote. None of this troubled Harry in the least; the more he had to contend with, the more he seemed to enjoy it and to revel in my discomfort, until at last, when I was almost beyond caring whether I ever saw Aldeburgh again, he dragged me on to the salttings and stood grinning down at me as if he had just landed a prize fish. But suddenly he gave a loud curse and dashed back into the water, leaving me to look after myself as best I could. Being in no condition to worry about this extraordinary change of temper, I staggered to the bank and set about the difficult process of bringing myself to life.

When my teeth had stopped chattering and I had got rid of the greater part of the river Alde by turning myself alternately upside down and inside out, I began to take a vague interest in what Harry was doing. And what he was doing was something quite remarkable. Knec-deep in the water, he appeared to be routing about with his hands under the surface; he worked this way and that way, bringing out old stones and pieces of stick and hurling them from him in disgust. After a while he waded towards the shore, bent over, and began to scour the depths in the region of his feet; but he had already churned the mud into such a mess that he could see nothing at all, so very soon he came on shore for good. Next he went down on all fours and crawled about on the mud, burrowing furiously backwards and forwards along the surface until the shore looked as if a team of drunken plough-

men had been at work on it. Whatever he was up to he didn't seem to be enjoying it, for all the while he kept up a fire of curses and uncouth noises. I watched this comedy until I had almost shivered myself into imbecility, and then I spluttered: "What the hell do you think you're doing, Harry?"

Harry looked up, saw that I was shaking in every limb, and immediately ceased his weird grovellings and gyrations to come to my assistance once more. As he set about me like a champion boxer working off a grudge against his sparring partner, punching me, mauling me, squeezing me, battering me up and down on the bank until I almost wished he would go back into the river again, he explained with a pathetic sadness: "Thass my ould pipe. Thass gorn. I kep ahowd o' that time we was a swimmin', there warn't wind nor water could shift that till yew went an' jucked your hid up cloos by the shoor an' trew that clean out o' me mouth. Oh dear, that truly is a pity, cause thass the bestest pipe iver I had an' I sharn't git another 'un like o' that not if I live to be a hunderd. I had that pipe iver since I was a boy an' I'd suner ha' lorst a year's ketch. Still, thass gorn now an' that on't dew na good fer me to stand hare a hollerin' ower it. Are yew warm now, chum? Stop yer dudderin' then an' I'll tell yew what we'll dew, we'll hev a race to t'other ind o' the island an' that'll mek yew wholly roight agen. But thass surely a pity I've lorst me little ould pipe arter I kep on to that thru all that parishin' piece o' water."

So we ran to the end of the island; or rather, Harry ran, carrying my thigh-boots slung across his back and stopping every few minutes to encourage me with

songs and shouts as I struggled and squelched and gasped in his wake. The squall was now howling across the river in full blast and Harry, the loss of his pipe forgotten for the moment, was as happy as a missel-thrush in a gale; covered in mud from head to foot, he danced up and down the bank, bawling at the top of his lungs while the wind flung his hair from side to side and the water streamed off his face as if he had just come out from under a shower. When we came to the top of the island we nearly had another disaster, for the only conveyance we could find was a dinghy with one oar and a hole in her bottom that might have been made with a fair-sized mallet. There followed a mighty race against time; when we were half-way across the water was over our ankles; but at last, punting, rowing, paddling, cheering himself on with yells and oaths that would have done credit to a college coach, Harry ran the wretched boat aground with about thirty seconds to spare. And then, after another run, we reached Orford, where, warned in advance by Harry's shouts, the fishermen came tumbling out of the shelter of their huts and houses to welcome us. I was put under the care of some of the Brinkley family, while the irrepressible Harry, without so much as a pause to get the water out of his ears, set off with a small party in a motor-boat to retrieve our dinghy before she should come to grief on the bar and also, I suspected, to keep a sharp look-out for his precious pipe at the same time.

I was led to the safety of a shed, where sympathetic Brinkleys brought me a jumble of clothing. In their excitement they forgot that the Brinkley who normally wore it was a broad man over six feet in height.

When I had finished arraying myself I looked like a dwarf dressed for the Music Halls; jacket, jersey and trousers that would have held with comfort me and my brother together were draped ludicrously about my thin, shivering form, while my feet were stranded in the wilderness of a large pair of bright yellow boots. I was standing dismally in the middle of the shed, too cold to laugh or cry, when a Brinkley looked in. He gaped. He snorted. He laughed. He called another Brinkley. Victor called Billy, Billy called George. In a couple of minutes every Brinkley in Orford was struggling to get a peep into the shed. They surrounded me, they took me out on to the quay, they stood back to gaze and to rock with laughter at the best free show the village had had since the mythical merman was brought ashore seven hundred years ago. By and by one of them bore me away to his cottage, and having displayed me for the enjoyment of his family, proceeded to regale me with gallons of tea, a blazing fire and thrilling tales of the heroisms and disasters of his forbears. Perhaps in a few more decades his own grandchildren will be telling how, one winter's morning a year or two later, this same Brinkley went to the rescue of a young officer who nearly blew himself and his comrade to pieces with a punt-gun in the Mansion Reach near Iken.

The squall had blown itself out long ago and I was nodding over the fire, with Brinkley's soft, husky voice still droning in my ears, when Harry came back at last. They had salvaged the dinghy about two hundred yards from the bar and had her safely in tow; but to this day Harry's pipe lies somewhere in the ooze off Havergate Island, and if he could find it now he would

put it in a frame and hang it over his mantelpiece. Truly I believe he would rather have stood the loss of a score of dinghies than be parted from that treasured pipe of his. It was many weeks before he forgave me fully for "jucking my hid up" and not lying passive as any sensible, half-drowned urchin ought to lie.

Those times of adventure and delight are past long ago, and I do not go much to the Alde nowadays. I hear that it has undergone many changes, and perhaps not all of them are for the good. One day last spring I went over to Aldeburgh, called on an old friend of mine, an ex-gamekeeper, with whom I still go wildfowling whenever I can, and walked with him over the marshes. Usually garrulous and informative, I thought he seemed oddly silent and depressed, but it was not until we came to the jetty that I discovered the reason. There, nestling against the bank, exactly opposite our favourite wildfowling haunt, were two newly built villas; on either side of them were plots neatly marked off and boards extolling the desirability of having a residence in such a position. For a full half-hour we sat together on the bank, watching in a kind of speechless horror while the proud owners busied themselves in laying out their rock-gardens. Suddenly my friend let loose a cataract of good Suffolk invective, wishing owners, builders and villas to the bottom of the river and deeper still. Then we got up and walked slowly home, and as I have no desire to get myself run in for libel I will not repeat what we said to each other on the way. Such things, I suppose, must be taken philosophically, and whatever should happen to the Alde, nothing can destroy the beauty of its broad reaches or the friendly solitude of Iken point or the

screaming chorus of the birds in the last moments before dawn. These are things beyond the reach of man, and to me the Alde will always be the river of my boyhood and the loveliest river in England.

A very different river is the Waveney; in fact, I cannot think of a single major point which the Waveney and the Alde have in common. The Waveney has all the attributes of the other Suffolk rivers: it twists and curves in the most absent-minded manner, it sends off a large family of small, purposeful tributaries; but it has something else as well. For some reason that I have never fathomed it seems to be the oldest and most independent of the rivers; you feel that whatever vital purpose it may have served and whatever excitements it may have known in its energetic youth are either forgotten entirely or remembered at odd moments with the indulgence of maturity. The Waveney is a self-sufficient river; it needs no changes of shape or size, no panorama of yachts and barges, to intrigue the passer-by. Once it was navigable by wherry as far as the staith at Bungay; nowadays the only activity it knows is the yearly Frolic at Beccles, which comprises sailing, swimming and many other competitions calculated to stir the mud of the river out of its settled peace and security. After this the Waveney returns to a normal life, its only job being the honorary one of keeping the peace between Norfolk and Suffolk.

It is long, unobtrusive, lethargic, and never monotonous. Can a river ever be monotonous? I am prepared to argue that it can't—least of all a tortuous and secretive river, that shows you nothing of its own accord. The Waveney is jealous of its privacy; its

character and its mysteries you must discover step by step for yourself. And if you want a quiet and unusual holiday, then I can think of nothing that will satisfy you more than to follow the Waveney from Redgrave to Breydon Water. It will take you at least two weeks, and it would take me at least two chapters. The most I can do here is to tell you of the highlights of the river itself, and then something of the country which borders it on the Suffolk side.

I guarantee that the Waveney will provide everything in the way of change which the most restless of souls can possibly desire. Its villages are small and scattered; sometimes they lie right in the heart of the marshes, which gives them a certain bleakness in winter. I remember one Christmas-time trying to get to the church at Syleham after a fortnight's heavy rain and finding it stranded; the meagre path that is its only communication with the village was a morass impassable to anyone without stilts or Wellingtons. A marsh is the perfect surrounding for a church in summer; but in winter the inhabitants must find it cold and inconvenient. Then the Waveney has a couple of grand Suffolk towns in Bungay and Beccles. I like Bungay the better of the two; the river here takes a large slice out of Norfolk by curving away in a loop behind the town, and from the top of this horse-shoe you have a beautiful view of Bungay across Outney Common and the marshes. There are otters here, and snipe and redshank and duck and heron, while in these quiet reaches of the Waveney a peculiar form of fishing is still carried on. It is called eel-babbing, a secret game of the night-time, and is a far more complicated method of catching eels than the

direct hit made by Old Sam Board on the Alde. I have never made an eel-bab: the recipe of it is known only to few. It consists of worms spiced with a tasty mixture of dung and threaded with a special kind of wool which catches in the eel's teeth; the line is then fixed to a pliant rod and dropped in the water to await results. Whether these results are more profitable than Old Sam Board's I cannot say.

You may well wonder why so difficult a process as threading the worms with wool is used in babbing, when plain hooks would surely answer the purpose. The reason is this: to unhook an eel is a frightful job, and if you try it you will probably end by getting covered in slime and having to cut your victim's head off in despair. When using wool you have to be very quick; you whisk the eel (or perhaps eels, for as many as three may be caught at once) out of the water and he drops off of his own accord into whatever receptacle is waiting for him. Babbing is not done at feeding-grounds or resting-places, as is pritching; it is most productive at *cleaning-grounds*, on beds of gravel or under the roots of willows and osiers. There are many other recondite points which none but the practised babber knows, but it would need a better man than I to explain them all to you.

Bungay has a castle, once another stronghold of the swashbuckling Bigods. Hugh Bigod apparently thought it the mightiest of all his castles, for he groaned aloud for its protection when King Henry bore down upon him at Framlingham; but nowadays there is no comparison between the two. The ruins at Bungay are very scanty, though thick and strong and embellished with ivy and moss; moreover, they are quite shut in

by houses and invisible until you are in the midst of them. Framlingham, gutted and despoiled, stormed and battered, has outlasted all its rivals; among the castles of the east it stands supreme on its little hill above the Alde.

Between Bungay and Beccles the Waveney is at its best, winding past locks and water-mills between broadening stretches of marsh criss-crossed with paths and trackways and dykes. Beccles itself is a quiet, pleasant old town, standing upon a promontory among the marshes. Both it and Bungay were almost ruined and obliterated by fires in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and thus they have not an equal chance with towns like Lavenham and Framlingham; but it is a great tribute to both of them that, having nothing of especial interest or antiquity, they should yet be models of what a country town can be if properly cared for and allowed to work out its own destiny without unpleasant and unnecessary interference.

From here the Waveney takes on an altogether grander aspect; as it nears the coast it comes out of hiding, the valley falls away on either side and the wide marshes are the best to be found inland in Suffolk. Inland—yes, they are always inland, because the river never reaches the sea; behind Lowestoft, when it seems to be heading straight for the coast, it suddenly curves back again, so that the north-east corner of Suffolk is a long promontory stretching right up to Yarmouth. The whole of this promontory is a holiday-makers' paradise, and the strangest thing about the Waveney is that to the end of its course it remains quite untouched by civilization, although it passes within less than a mile of two of the most popular

places on the East Coast, Oulton Broad and Fritton Lake. Of these I propose to say nothing more than that in summer both are very lovely and very over-crowded, while in winter, when Fritton is given over exclusively to wildfowl, both are very quiet and very deserted.

At the head of this long, unassuming river comes a moment of real magnificence. On the high, flat ground above the meeting-point of the Waveney and Breydon Water stands Burgh Castle, generally said to be the finest Roman ruin in all England. All that is left of it now are three walls, but you need no tricks of fancy to imagine what a colossal encampment it must once have been; the walls enclose a space—now an arable field—of about 640 feet by 400 feet, large enough to contain at least a thousand men if need be. In those days the Norfolk Broadlands did not exist: they were submerged under one great estuary, so that this was probably the key position on the whole coast between the Wash and the Thames. Anchor rings and various pieces of naval equipment have been found in the marsh, and from this it is thought that the Roman fleet lay beneath the western side of the fort, which stood open to the water. The Romans chose well, and they built well: the masonry of those great walls is astonishing. They are about fifteen feet high and nine feet thick (nearly fifteen feet at the base) and consist of flint with parallel layers of flat brick, while on the east side are four squat, round turrets. The walls are fairly well preserved; they have lost nothing of their shape or size, although some sections have collapsed on their sides and others are leaning so dangerously that they are quite liable to follow suit in a year or

two. It seems a pity that they cannot be supported by a few plain beams and timbers. God help the army that tried to storm such a stronghold!

You must not expect romantic wanderings here as you would at Framlingham or Bury. But what will delight you is the view, a view such as I love above all others. On the west side of the fort there is no wall, and from here you look down upon the river and miles of flat, green marshland beyond it. Nothing has encroached upon this landscape: Yarmouth and its environs are providentially hidden, a noxious row of pylons keeps well out of sight to the south, while there is not a single new building. Instead there are thirteen windmills (surely a record for one view?) of different shapes and sizes, a few scattered cottages, and dykes running out like quicksilver over the green plain. Find me another river in England which ends in such a lovely setting, with the lonely old fortress on the one side and the wide, warm spread of marshes on the other.

Almost more than the Waveney itself I like the country that surrounds it. It is the wildest and most desolate of all the Suffolk country, a stretch of high land dipping down into tiny valleys, of insubordinate hedges and narrow, aimless lanes. Here the signposts point as they please, here you may walk for hours and meet nothing more civilized than a couple of horny labourers and a few derelict farms—and at the end of the day you are quite likely to find yourself back at your starting-point. The wildest and most confusing walk you can possibly take is over that stretch covering the groups of villages known as the South Elmhalls or South Elmhams and the Ilketshalls;

here, believe it or not, within a radius of a few miles are villages called St. Cross or Sancroft St. George, St. James, St. Margaret, All Saints-cum-St. Nicholas, St. Michael, St. Peter, St. Lawrcnee, St. John, St. Andrew and St. Margaret again. Some are South Elmham, others are Ilketshalls, and I don't suppose that half the inhabitants know which are which. It took me all day to find my way to the Minster at St. Cross when first I went there, and about midday I began to amuse myself by asking the worthies, what few of them I met, for the right road to South Elmham All Saints-cum-St. Nicholas, just to note their various reactions.

The Saxon Minster is lost, utterly lost and forlorn; it is literally miles from anywhere and, as the nearest road or lane is at least three fields away, it is one of the most difficult places to find in the whole of Suffolk. It is a ruin lying near a little stream in a hollow of the fields, surrounded by trees, an earthwork and a dry moat. It is a romantic spot, but unfortunately there is all too little of the Minster left; it must once have been a vast building, for the space within the earthworks is a square of some three and a half acres. Elmham Minster is supposed to have been the place that took most of the early glory away from Dunwich; in the seventh century Dunwich was the chief stronghold of Christianity in Britain, but after a while the see was divided and half given to Elmham. There is little magnificence about it now, for all that is left is concentrated in a rectangle of about forty feet by twenty feet—a few thick, uneven flint walls, with the vague shapes of arches and windows, and some isolated pillars; and the ruins themselves are almost over-

shadowed by the grand oaks and ashes spreading above them. I believe that some scholarly gentleman once identified these remains as definite parts of a church; well, he is a better man than I am; all my imagination could not coax them into any sort of form or coherence. But Elmham, gaunt and tumbled, is not forgotten; some of its lost glory was dimly kindled when the Suffolk Pilgrimage Society held a service last summer among its rotted walls. I hope that the way was well posted, so that the pilgrims did not go round in circles and arrive the following week.

Almost as hard to find is Wingfield Castle, which stands on a wooded plateau two miles from the river. Now here is something concrete, wholly satisfying, a place that you can enjoy yard by yard without any tremendous knowledge of antiquity or desperate groping of the imagination. Of course, it cannot compare with Framlingham and, truth to tell, the title of castle is given it only by courtesy; it was really a fortified manor house, but fortified in such a way as to make the distinction hardly noticeable. Its position is a fine one, for it looks across a green expanse lined on one side by a few scattered cottages and a stretch of rich arable land bounded in the distance by a long wood. Seeing it thus, the castle promises great things, for the gatehouse and the curtain wall which face you make a squat, solid building, turreted, battlemented and pierced by tall, mullioned windows; behind it, however, there is nothing save a fragment of the side walls. But the gatehouse itself is so perfect that it can hardly be called a ruin at all. On one side of the gravelled courtyard is a strange and rickety drawbridge, on the other is a sixteenth-century house,

built after the castle was dismantled and rising, like the gatehouse, sheer out of the moat. It is one of the loveliest farm-manor houses I know, and its yellow plaster and wealth of beams, chimneys and large windows contrast harmoniously with the notched, uneven flint of the castle walls. Beyond this house there is not a trace of the castle; there is instead a beautiful garden stretching away to the far side of the moat.

Wingfield is too gentle a place to excite in you feelings of majesty and awe, to flood you with a sense of destruction and deeds of devilry. It has not the tempestuous history that clings about the walls of Framlingham; but its owners, the great family of the de la Poles, ran a very good second to the unbelievable Bigods. Michael, the first one, builder of the castle, was Earl of Suffolk, Chancellor of England and a very powerful man; but when jealousy dethroned him he fled to Paris, disguised as a Flemish poultreer, and there died meekly in 1387. No Bigod, I feel, would ever have allowed that to happen: he would have upped and struck at least one desperate blow in defence of his personal pride. Michael the second caught a fever and died at the siege of Harfleur—again, a Bigod would probably have strangled any fever with his bare hands. His eldest son fell at Agincourt, and then came William, a man who had nearly the same romantic rougery as that treacherous lion, Hugh Bigod, himself.

William de la Pole was successively Earl, Marquis and Duke of Suffolk. He began well enough. He fought in France for over fifteen years, and led the English army at the siege of Orleans against Joan of Arc. Then his ambition got the better of him: he engineered the unpopular marriage of Henry VI to

Margaret of Anjou, whom, according to his enemies, he himself had known rather too well in days gone by, and at once, with her help, set about raising himself to the virtual governorship of England. He succeeded admirably, and for a time he held complete ascendancy over the weak and unworldly King. Politically he was more powerful than Hugh Bigod ever had been; but when his back was to the wall he had not quite the same strength and ferocity. Humphrey, the "good" Duke of Gloucester, uncle of the King, declared loudly and publicly just what he thought of William, and Humphrey was such a dangerous man that de la Pole must break him at all costs.

The Duke's position was dangerously undermined when his wife Eleanor was charged with sorcery and treasonable conspiracy with Margaret Jourdain, the witch of Eye, and an astronomer named Roger Bolingbroke. She was convicted and sent to be imprisoned in the Isle of Man. After this the King's mind was gradually and subtly poisoned against his uncle. In 1447 Parliament was held at Bury St. Edmunds, and to this came Humphrey, hoping to secure a pardon for his wife. Five days later he was found dead in his bed in St. Saviour's Hospital, on the outskirts of the town. One man was declaimed as his murderer—William de la Pole, who found his power slipping from him with calamitous speed. England turned upon him as only England can; within two years he was impeached, disgraced and sentenced to banishment in France. Hounded out of the country, he went willingly enough, protesting his innocence the while; he started from Ipswich, but scarcely had he reached the Straits of Dover when his boat was stopped by a man-of-war.

"Hail, traitor!" cried the captain, hauled him on board, and by and by sent him down into a wretched cockboat to be beheaded over the gunwale. And so his end was even more ignominious than were his methods in later life.

The whole story, William's rise to power, the murder of Gloucester and the scene on the boat, is told by Shakespeare in the second part of *Henry VI*. He makes the captor not a man-of-war, but a pinnace, and William and the captain have a furious slanging-match before the former is taken down to the cock-boat. William's last words are grand and heroic:

Come, soldiers, show what cruelty ye can,  
That this my death may never be forgot!  
Great men oft die by vile bezonians:  
A Roman sworder and banditto slave  
Murder'd sweet Tully; Brutus' bastard hand  
Stabb'd Julius Cæsar; savage islanders  
Pompey the great: and Suffolk dics by pirates!

Some maintain that William is buried in Wingfield's lovely church. Of this I know not, but there are two de la Pole monuments in the church; one of them is the tomb of that Michael who died at Harfleur. Lying upon it are the wooden effigies of Michael and his wife, and they are acknowledged to be two of the finest in England. The other is the tomb of John de la Pole, in full armour and with his tilting helmet above his head, and his wife, Elizabeth Plantagenet; these effigies, smooth, canopied and worked in alabaster, are certainly the most lovely to the layman's eye. The church has yet a third tomb, that of Sir John Wingfield, one-time owner of the manor, friend of the Black

Prince and founder of a college of priests which is now incorporated in a farmhouse close by the graveyard.

The de la Poles were a wild lot; they were more often in trouble than out of it, and most of them came to violent ends. After William came John, who furthered his prosperity by marrying Elizabeth Plantagenet, sister of two kings. While his brothers-in-law were on the throne his fortunes soared, but when Henry VII succeeded them he rapidly lost favour. However, he was clever enough to weather the storm so well that he actually bore the sceptre at the coronation. He died a peaceful death in the castle in 1491, but before that the last phase of his family's disaster had already begun. His son, the Earl of Lincoln, threw himself into the cause of Lambert Simnel and was slain in 1487 at the battle of Stoke. Two other sons outlived their father only to die with a minimum of glory: Edmund, having lived in exile for fourteen years, returned imprudently and was promptly beheaded by that patron of executioners, Henry VIII; Richard, thinking it better to remain in France, lent a hand in that country's troubles and was killed at the battle of Pavia. And with him, in 1525, the story of the de la Poles came to a close, and the story of Wingfield, too; the castle was soon afterwards dismantled by one Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, whose life was so stormy and exciting that I wish I had the space to tell you of it here.

No, the de la Poles had not quite the furious pride, the rebellious insouciance, the to-hell-with-the-monarch spirit of the Bigods. The Bigods revelled in adversity; the de la Poles submitted to it. Even William one imagines to have been a bit of a whiner when the

odds were growing heavy, though Shakespeare did not make him so. Still, their record is a rough and romantic one, and their castle a place of great dignity and peace.

Of all the happenings on the river Waveney the strangest and most famous was the murder of East Anglia's patron saint, the great King Edmund, at Hoxne (pronounced Hoxon) in A.D. 870. The spoilsport is dubious as to whether Hoxne was the place at all; however, he cannot prove his argument, and I prefer to take it, as most people do, that the murder was actually done in this village. I call Edmund great; but little is known of his reign, and it is possible that he was really rather a weak young man, whose fame originated solely in the legends that grew up around his martyrdom.

One fine morning I was walking into Hoxne, a quiet, delightful village built up and down a valley, watered by the Dove and its two small tributaries, the Dove in its turn being a branch of the Waveney. I came to a bridge about a mile outside the village and paused for a while, wondering how I could find out if this was part of what I was seeking. A hundred yards away I saw a bent, ancient man, slowly and methodically cutting the grass of the hedge-bank with a reap-hook; and to him I went, with scarcely any hope, knowing the Suffolk character as I do, of gleaning much information at the first attempt. As I neared him I saw that he was very old, that his face was very brown and very puckered, that he was wearing a bright, rakish neckerchief, and that his thin, crooked shanks were bound with a pair of brown cloth gaiters which buttoned up the front.

"Grand morning, eh?" said I. "Can you tell me if that's the Goldbrook Bridge just back there?"

The old man straightened up. His eyes, which were blue and clear, had a humorous twinkle in them as he looked at me.

"Ah! Edmund?" he asked, with a slow grin.

"That's right," I said, rather taken aback.

"Well, thass a rum un!" said the old fellow delightedly. "There's scoors o' fowks come this way summertime axin about Edmund, but yew're the fustest one thass put me a sinsible question this whull bloomin year. My, thass a change, that is! Whoi, ony last week there was a highflitin sort o' lady come thru ere in a car with a shuffer a drivin it, she pull 'longside o' me an she say, 'Hoi, roadman!' she say, 'how far to Hoxne'—Hox-ne she culled it—"an where can I find the remains of Edward?'

"Marm," I say, "there ain't no Edward around ere nor iver has bin nor his remains neither, cept ould Edward Doolberry what live against the "Red Lion", but yew on't git much out o' him, he's a risin ninety-tew pore ould chap." "On't yew be a fule, roadman," she say, "there's surely a King Edward what was mudderied in these parts cause I know dam well there is."

"Marm," I say, "if yew're a lookin fer King Edward yew're in the wrong country, cause he abdick-erated more'n a year back an he's gorn ower to France now, if yew want to find King Edward thass where yew better go tew, cause thass in France yew'll find that pore gemman an yew on't find no Edwards ere."

"That lady she niver spok another word, she shut the winder an the shuffer driv orf pretty quick, that

whully set her liver a bilin that did. Larf? I sat cre till me buttons was near busted! My word, that was a real bit o' fun I had 'long o' her, me missus an me we'll be a larfin over that till Micklemas I shoulden wonder.

"However, this ere ain't the Goldbrook Bridge," he concluded; "thass out tuther ind o' the village about a mile orf." He looked at me for a moment. "I s'pose yew know all about Edmund?" he asked, rather wistfully I thought.

I was struck by a sudden idea. Something in his voice told me that it was worth trying. "No," I said innocently, "as a matter of fact I don't know much about him. Do you?"

"Ah," said the old man, "I know the moost on it."

"Do you indeed?" I exclaimed. "I wish you'd tell me."

"Sartinly I'll tell yew," said he, "if yew'vec got the time to listen."

Time! I was prepared to listen till nightfall. We sat down on the bank, shaded by the tall hedge from the hot June sunlight. I selected a few tasty stems from the long grasses now lying thickly up and down the bank, lay back and gazed into the smooth bluc sky; my companion carefully placcd his reap-hook beside him and sat hunched up, with his freckled hands clasped round his knees. And this, as he told it me beside the little road that leads westward out of Hoxne, is the story of St. Edmund.

This ere that I'm tellin ycw is moostly what I rid in th'ould book what the Reverend Dyson loant me time I was quite a young un, he said maybe thass not all accordin to whass whully roight, but that on't

matters any'ow cause he said there's allus bin a lot o' confilction wi the schollers ower it an nobuddy on't know the trewth fer sartin it seems. Moost likely I sharn't tell that so good as I could once, I han't towd that fer years now, people ain't interisted in them things these days, but I've allus kep that story in me mind iver since I fust rid it an I reckon I can rember that pretty fair.

Thass hunderds o' years agoo now, my thass some ould while back that is, time the Sassons<sup>1</sup> was a livin in Britten, quite frindly fowks they was tew arter a lot o' fightin time they fust come ere. The people a livin on this ere Coost was culled Eastingles<sup>2</sup> an this Edmund he was their King, quite a young chap he was tew, he warn't above fifteen time he come on the throun. He got along pretty well at fust an he kep the country all roight, cause he was a good sort of a Chrischen an not a 'eathen by any means, them bad days was gorn an done with, fact they had a damgret charch ower at Dunnidge wi a mort o' bishups an relijus fowks a doin good things that way.

Howsever, this ere din't larst long. Acrost the Noth Sea there was the Deens,<sup>3</sup> o' course they're still there, but lawkadaisy they ain't like they was in them days, they're dacent chaps now by all accounts. They must ha bin whully a savidge lot o' davils cause they'd bin up to no ind o' trubble ariddy, sendin ower the Wikins as they culled em in a lot o' quare boots<sup>4</sup> an messin up the whull bloomin country. Well, letly they'd bin pretty easy wi their tricks an young Edmund was a gettin on all roight when what d'yew think, suthen went an happened that was jest bloody inforchnit.

<sup>1</sup>Saxons.

<sup>2</sup>East Angles.

<sup>3</sup>Danes.

<sup>4</sup>boats.

Seems they had a King, I carn't whully rember is name now, that was Luddybreg or suthen like that I think, a quare soundin lot o' names they all had; well this' ere Luddy he was a gret boy at hockin,<sup>1</sup> an I recken that must ha bin a fine sport tew an if anybuddy'd tek on to that agin these days that'd be a good thing I'm sure. Well one day Luddy's hock went an fill in the sea an he say, " Oh dam, that surely is a pity," he say. " I ain't a goin to loose me little ould hock that I ain't. Give me a boot," he say, " cause I'm a goin out an git that afore thass drownded issell, I on't care if that blow the davil's own wind." An that did blow the davil's own wind tew, but he wouldeñ listen to nobuddy, not im, he jest went an jumped into a little ould dingy an shuff<sup>2</sup> orf. " Come yew back ere boy," they say, " yew leave that bloody hock be, dew that little boot o' yours'll git smoshed to pisses." But he was a rough chap an he wouldeñ tek na noottis, afore they could hull im out on it he'd blew roight out to sea an there warn't nobuddy could git im back agin.

My word, that was whully a brutal sort o' woij<sup>3</sup> he had, a sloshin about in the Noth Sea in that tittley little consarn all by issell pore chap, time that blowed enuf to fetch the innards out o' the *Queen Meery*. That was a whull week that blowed im about, an dret if he din't then goo an wash up at Reedham in Nar'k. By'nby 'long come young Edmund an fount im a lyin soshways<sup>4</sup> acrost the gunnel, he was pretty near did, what wi starwashen<sup>5</sup> an cowld, an wet thru like a mawkin<sup>6</sup> arter a storm. " Whoi, whatever's this?" Edmund say. " He's a proper wrack pore davil, ain't

<sup>1</sup> hawking. <sup>2</sup> shoved. <sup>3</sup> voyage. <sup>4</sup> sideways. <sup>5</sup> starvation. <sup>6</sup> scarecrow.

he? Here," he say, " tek im up to the little ould pallis together an give im some drink an wittles, an watch out he on't get kilt on the way. He's a furriner by the looks of im," he say, " but that on't matters." So they took im orf to the pallis, that was at Caister in them days, an so sune as he could spik he say, " Look ere together," he say, " I'm Luddy an I'm King o' the Deens," an he towd Edmund what'd happened time the little ould hock went an fill in the sea. " Well, thass a rum un," Edmund say, " an if thass whew yew are I on't want to quarrel wi yew, boy," he say, " I allus did like to be frindly with iverybuddy an what I say is one man's as good as the next. An if yew're a one fer hockin thass all roight," he say, " cause we got some good hocks ower ere an yew can set an enjoy yerself proper till yew want to goo hoom." He was a good boy, pore young Edmund, he could larn them Dick-taters a thing or two I reckon.

Well, that sune happened they got so frindly that Luddy he din't want to goo back hoom at all, he fared to settle down in the pallis 'long of Edmund jest like his farder. Now Edmund he had no ind o' sarvints y'know, the chiftest of em he was culled Barn or suthen, a brutal chap he was, han't no respeck an up to all mander o' daviltry, an that warn't long afore he gotten reg'lar jallus an he say to issel, " Look ere, boy," he say, " this ere on't dew at all, this bloomin furriner's now a shuffin your nowse orf your face," he say. So one mornin time he'd took Luddy orf hockin he jumped up an kilt im, on't s'pose he gin im a fair chance even, moost like come up be'ind an clouted im on the hid afore the pore ould boy could defind issel, he was that wild ower hockin thass likely he niver nottissed

what was up. Then Barn he say, "Thass roight, boy," he say, "yew done a good job there. Git yew orf hoom now an live easy fer the rest o' your mottal life." So he dig a hool fust an he shuff pore ould Luddy in an run back to the pallis as pleased as plums.

However, that din't wark out accordin to what he'd thot. Ould Luddy he had a grey'ound or a wippet or suthen an that kep a runnin backerds and forards acrost is master's grev an d'yew know what, that little ould dawg that whully med sech a davil of a row that brot em all out o' the pallis to see what was a goin on. Well o' course they see where the arth was fresh laid an they dug that up, they han't gorn more'n a cupple o' fit afore they fount the copse stritched out stiff as lead.

My, young Edmund he got in a turr'ble state, he jump up an down an he say, "Whew's the fule done this ere?" he say. "Come on together, spik up! Which o' yew min<sup>1</sup> bin an done sech damrotten tricks? Show me that faller an I'll trosh the arse orf o' him," he say. Well one way an nuther he fount out that was Barn done it an Lor, he got so angry he coulden hardly spik. "Whoi, yew bloody fule yew," he say, "yew mis'rable bloody ould warment, I niver thot me chifest sarvint'd goo an play sech games as that. Tell ye what I'll dew," he say, "tell ye what I'll dew: I'll sarve yew same as he was sarved, I'll put yew in is little ould boot, I still got that," he say, "thass down on the shoor, case iver he wanted fer to goo hoom. Thass what I'll dew, dret if I 'on't, I'll put yew in is little ould boot, an if yew git drownded that on't matters, an if yew wash up tuther side I hoop them

<sup>1</sup>men.

Deens'll give yew a damgret hidin," he say, "cause thass what yew need. Of all the bloody fules," he say, "to goo an dew a snakin, brutal thing like that."

Well, that warn't na good fer Barn to holler, cause Edmund he took im down to the shoor, he fount the little ould boot an he took the oors out on it an he shuffed im orf. "Yew shut that row, sailor," he say, "yew're orf now an yew got to look arter yerself, on't yew sit an mek that dam noise, dew yew on't git far." Pretty sune a wev come up an lumped im roight amidships, so he shut down all roight, an that warn't long afore he was out in the Noth Sea an a driftin like fun-oh.

Dret if that din't goo an happen same as wi pore ould Luddy, that davil Barn he went an got washed up tuther side, he din't git drownded at all an thass sartin he deserved it tew. But he washed up roight enuf an a lot o' Deens come along, they hulled im out an they then went orf an fitched somebuddy what could git some sinse out of im. An whew d'yew think they fitched? Whoi, that was Luddy's two sons, I carn't rember their names, thass tew much of a twister fer me, but these ere two they come down to the shoor an they say, "Whoi, dret if that there ain't farder's little ould boot, d'ye mind the time he went an rew<sup>1</sup> arter is bloomin hock what fill in the sea pore ould boy? Well, thass a rum un! Thass the same boot cause I know dam well it is. Now then yew faller," they say, "where's our farder gorn an is he did or 'live?"

This ere Barn he was whully a parishin article, yew'd ha thot he'd med enuf trubble ariddy, but no, what d'yew think, he jump up an say, "Whoi, if

<sup>1</sup> rowed.

thass ould Luddy your farder," he say, jest like that, "then he's did fer sartin. Thass young Edmund kilt im, I sin im dew it," he say, "thass young Edmund whass King o' the Sassons, an a naasty faller he is tew." My word, if I'd ha bin there I'd ha gin im King o' the Sassons, thass one sure thing they knew all about lyin in them days. "Well, thass a rum trick," says the two min, "think o' pore ould farder a gettin kilt by that there mis'rable little King ower in Britten. Tell ye what," they say, "thass ony jest acrost the Noth Sea, we'll now goo ower an sarve im out, by God thass what we'll dew," an they went an got a whull foss<sup>1</sup> o' sojers, twenty thousant of em, that must ha bin a bloomin gret army fer them days, they put em aboard them quare boots they had an then set orf. If Barn went 'long with em I dunno I'm sure, I on't think as he'd hardly a had the narve, howsever he was sech a 'partinent bloody critcher there's no tellin.

These ere Deens they had marder in em, they din't giv a cat's ear fer nobuddy, they landed up in the noth o' Britten, Yorksher way somewheres, an they whully med sech a mess up there that was five year afore they come down these parts at all. Little ould Edmund he was riddy for em, good boy, he come out of is pallis at Thetford an he fot em a whull day thru, but that warn't na good, he han't got the min an he warn't strong enuf altogether. So he then went to Framlingem but they shuffled im out o' that an he come up ere to Hoxon all by issself pore chap, he was so done up he went an crulled in under th'ould Goldbrook Bridge an was pretty sun'e asleep. Them Deens was a comin up be'ind roight enuf, but they'd lorst im,

<sup>1</sup>force.

that was whully luck what hoped <sup>1</sup> em dew they woulден ha ketched im at all.

By'nby there come a chap an a gal, orf to be marrerd they was, they come 'long ower the bridge, they was a scroogin an a noodlin one nuther like willy-oh, silly young fules, so they stopped on the Goldbrook a bit cause they din't think therec was nobuddy about. Time they was a noodlin together yew woulден ha thot as they'd ha nottissed much would yew, but dret if she din't then goo an sing out, "Whoi, John boy," she say, "stop tittlin me will yew, whatever's that down there, there's suthen a glistin in the watter d'yew see?" "Whoi, thass roight, Meery," he say, "there's suthen down under th'ould bridge, that look like a cupple o' sparrings <sup>2</sup> on't yew think so? There's ony one chap has gowld sparrings like that," he say, "an thass King Edmund, the Deens is arter im," he say, "less goo an tell em." Now I dew think that was the wustest trick of all, pore young faller he niver ad na luck did he?

Oh ah, that surely was a rotten trick, this ere cupple they went orf an fitched the Deens, ould Luddy's two sons an the whull blessed army, they come a runnin up an took ahowd o' young Edmund an hulled im out from under the little ould bridge. "Oho, me little King-o," they say, "yew're ketched now an yew're a goin to be kilt an no mistake. But ere's one thing," they say, "will yew give up yer Chrisheranity afore yew're kilt, y'know kind o' change yer relijun like, cause thass the wrong un yew got there, boy." But young Edmund he was a merry kerajus chap, he whully stuck by what he thot was roight, dew they moight ha let im orf. "I ain't a goin to give up nuthen fer

<sup>1</sup> helped.

<sup>2</sup> spurs.

yew," he say, "yew're a rotten lot o' barstids the whull bloody bag of ye." "Thass all roight, boy," they say, "we on't waste na more time then," they hulled im orf to a fild an tied im to a owk tree an they took the whip to im, like a lot o' savidges they was, han't no marcy fer the pore boy. Howsever, they din't kill im that way, they shot all their arrers into im an they then cut is hid orf, an thass how they left im under that ould tree an then went orf arter a lot more daviltry all over the country.

Thass a funny thing about that ould tree, there's allus bin a lot of argerment about this ere story, there's many said as how Hoxon warn't the roight place at all, but d'yew know what? whoi, that little ould tree that stood in that fild hunderds an hunderds o' years, St. Edmund's owk they culled that, my mawther an farder they could rember that a standin there an they towd me the both on em that was the damdest gret tree yew iver did see, but that fill down about ninety year agoo time that got tew hivvy. Well, time that fill down there was a writin faller come 'long an he writ arterwards an say he had a good look at the trunk an what d'yew think? dret if he din't then goo an find a little ould arrhead in that, that ad grew roight into the wood, he went an counted the rings round that an he reckened that ould owk ad bin a growin more'n a thousant year. That must ha bin the same bloody tree he say, dew how'd that bloomin arrhead come there?

That little ould tree that laid there a time, then they took that orf an put up a kind o' monierment where that ad grew, thass a stoon cross stand in a fild o' whate.<sup>1</sup> Moost likely yew'll hev to look fer that yerself,

<sup>1</sup> wheat.

the fowks around ere they on't bother much about that, fact they on't hardly know thass there at all.\*

My word, though, ere's suthen I a'most forgot, bless me if I din't, an thass a good bit tew. Time the Deens took pore young Edmund orf from the bridge he went an laid a cuss on all young chaps an gals what'd iver parss that way a going to git marrerd, an I on't blame im tew, whoi Lor, I'd ha gin em a cuss meself if they'd ha sarved me that trick, that whully was a shame how they tritted im. Moost on em on't tek na notis o' that these days, but d'yew know what? there was a gal a year or two back lived up against the "Lion", what was a goin to git marrerd in the charch, but I went an towd her about the little ould cuss an would she goo ower that bridge, not she, silly daft thing, that tarned out so she dam near din't git marrerd at all, she culled that orf an went roight round to Eye instead, did yew iver hare sech a thing? Her young chap an the Reverend Barker they got mad at me, culled me a bloomin mischiverous ould davil they did, but I din't mind that, Lor, that whully med me larf to see em git in sech a frap.

Well, thass pretty near the ind about little ould Edmund. Arter he was did is frinds come 'long an fount is copse a layin there, the Deens ad trew is hid

\* Quite right. I asked at four different cottages for directions to the cross, and nobody had heard of it; I afterwards found that all four cottages were within 200 yards of the spot. Before this I had come to a bridge at the end of the village, where I met an Old Etonian, whom I asked if he knew whether this were the Goldbrook Bridge. He didn't know the Goldbrook Bridge at all, and by the look he gave me I think he considered me quite mad. I then happened to glance at the end of the bridge, on which I saw the following inscription: "Goldbrook Bridge, A.D. 1878. King Edmund taken prisoner here, A.D. 870." Heavens alive! poor Edmund is our saint, king, martyr and patron, and it seems that in this village famed in legend nobody but my old friend by the roadside has the least idea of his existence. Still, you can't educate a Suffolk man, whether he be Old Etonian or simple cottager.

away time they cut that orf, an they say, "Look ere," they say, "we carn't bury this ere without we find the hid fust." So they set about an look fer that, they went into a wood 'longside an by'nby they started a cullin out to axe the hid where that'd got tew. Thass a marvellous funny thing, suthen went an shruck out "Hare, hare, hare," an that was th'ould hid, thass allus fared to me like a bit o' friction<sup>1</sup> I must say. However, they come up an fount a bloomin gret oolf<sup>2</sup> got ahowd o' that in is pors,<sup>3</sup> an he runned orf an what d'yew think? that there ould oolf he kep a runnin about the filds wi' that hid an that was a two-tree weeks afore he gin that up. Thass a rum un, ain't it, how he din't want to let that goo? However, he set down one day an he kep that in is pors till they come up with im, an dret if he din't then give that up as jintle as a dawg with a bard.\*

They took that hid an so sune as they set that down that went an jined up wi the buddy, roight afore their bloomin eyes, time they stood a gawpin like a lot of ould fish. "Well, thass rum doins, that is," they say, "there's ony one meanin to that. This ere Edmund he's a blessed saint," they say, so they took an buried im in a little ould chapel what stood on top the hill an d'ycw know what? that gret oolf that kep 'longside the whull time till he sin the buddy cuverred up in the grev an then went orf back in the woods, a truly nice critcher he must ha bin, thass a pity oolfs is all kilt orf now though they wasn't all s'kind-artered

<sup>1</sup> fiction.      <sup>2</sup> wolf.      <sup>3</sup> paws.

\* Hence the crest of Bury St. Edmunds, which I spoke of in chapter three. On the shield are three crowns, each pierced by two crossed arrows; this is surmounted by a helmet, and on top of it sits the wolf, offering the crowned head of St. Edmund between his paws.

as im I dessay. Well, that buddy that laid there tharty-three year, yes, that laid all that time in th'ould chapel, but they come an took that orf to Bury St. Edmunds an that niver come back to Hoxon na more. Thass whully a pity that is, cause there was some quare things happened arter that I dew believe, mirkles an sech I've hard. That little ould chapel thass gorn tew, thass years an years agoo now, Reverend Dyson he towd me once that stood roight where th'ould Abbey House stand against the "Lion", howsever I on't know nuthen about that, na more on't nobuddy else, an that on't dew fer yew to axe, dew they coulden tell yew, they on't know much around this way.

So thass what happened to pore Edmund, young chap, I hoop I got that all roight, thass years since I towd that larst, but thass a story I'm fond o' tellin ony there ain't nobuddy care to listen. Sit yew down an try to rember that, boy, dew yew can tell that tew, that story's wuth suthen an yew on't hare that towd these days cept by a scholler. Young Edmund he was a good sort o' boy, thass whully a sad life he had an he din't desarve that neither. I allus think we could dew with some more of is sort these days, dessay a few like im could larn some of em to be proper good Kings an thass the trewth.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE COAST

HOWEVER strong may be the arguments required to convince the detractors of Suffolk's countryside, I know one thing for certain—there is no need for me to make out a case for the Suffolk coast. I have never met anyone who, even if he had spent no more than a day on our coast, had anything but praise for it.

The real glory of Suffolk is the coast, and yet it is a stretch not in the least representative of the popular idea of England's coast-line. So much the better, for on its very difference rests its whole character and reputation. Here there is no majestic sweep of cliffs, no frothy surging of sea against grim, sturdy rocks, no roll of downland and no broad, sandy beaches. Instead, there is—but what there is you will presently see for yourself.

The love of cliffs is so deeply ingrained in the English mind that I am rather astonished that the Suffolk coast is held in such high esteem. In all probability it is only the lucky man with the chance of sailing up the coast who realizes that such things as cliffs exist in Suffolk; to the ordinary visitor (unless he stays at Felixstowe, Lowestoft or Southwold), who makes a few half-hearted and haphazard excursions, the coast-line

must seem entirely flat. However, there are cliffs, though none of them, I think, is so much as a hundred feet high; they appear only at the most irregular intervals and with no attempt at continuity. They are sand cliffs, treacherous and beautiful. For one who knows them from the seaward side their beauty is enhanced by the eternal flatness from which they rise, and which makes them seem grander and more massive than they really are; but when I think of the coast, and try to analyse the fascination of it, then I realize that the cliffs mean very little. The whole essence of the Suffolk coast is suggested by a remark which I have just made: that it is probably only the yachtsman or sailor who knows that the cliffs exist at all. Why? Because from inland this coast will defy all the efforts of the most determined explorer.

Ever since the War there has been an increasing clamour against the spoliation of the English countryside; there have been suggestions, altercations, schemes, threats, entreaties, and with it all hardly any compromise or cohesion has been attained. And now the plea has been narrowed down from the vague general term of the English countryside to something more limited, more definite, and even more important—the English coast-line. It began, I think, with a bitter (and successful) fight to save a certain part of the Sussex Downs. The Press reported this affair with much interest and gusto, and one paper published an article by a very distinguished man, whom I have admired for many years as naturalist, author and sportsman, and whose word I believe implicitly, which fairly made me gasp. Travelling eastwards from Cornwall, he described the coast-line piece by piece; in

lurid, unexaggerated terms he spoke of vandalisms and excrescences of whose existence I had no idea; he told, too, of how they came to be there, of the profits that certain sharp-witted gentlemen had enjoyed from them, of the sporadic struggle to stem the tide of disfigurement, of the carelessness and apathy that encouraged it. All this astonished and dismayed me, for I had never before suspected what a desperate point had been reached. The author skirted Essex, and wrote sadly of what he had seen there in the last few years; then he came to Suffolk and Norfolk, and to them he gave the palm, not equally, because he awarded it to Suffolk above all others. And not for a long time have I read anything which gave me so much pleasure.

I sat back and considered what he had written, comparing the coast of Suffolk with the others that I know. And finally I came to this conclusion: the Suffolk coast, by its very nature, is its own saviour.

Firstly, there is no coast road, and there never will be. The main road from London to Yarmouth, bulging with traffic throughout the summer, does not give its passengers a glimpse of the sea until it is almost upon the outskirts of Lowestoft. It does not even run parallel to the coast; below Lowestoft it heads farther and farther inland with every mile. And so the only way of exploring various points on the sea is to take a road leading off from the main one, see what you want to and come back by nearly the same route; I know but one place where a car can continue unimpeded for a mile or two along the coast—I am not including the stretch between Lowestoft and Yar-

mouth—and one other where it can progress with the aid of a ferry.

The length of the coast-line is about fifty miles, and between Lowestoft and Felixstowe there are only eight towns or villages that can truthfully be described as being on the sea. Between Dunwich and Thorpeness, seven miles, there is no sort of settlement save a few small houses at Sizewell; in the eighteen miles or so from Aldeburgh to Bawdsey there is nothing except a seaplane base, conveniently placed in one of the most desolate spots in all England, and a handful of cottages called Shingle Street, a place so small that if it did not boast a pub it could not be called a village at all. You have only to walk along the coast for half a dozen miles to realize that a coast road, even if it were possible to build one—heaven help the man who tried—would be quite futile.

Suffolk is difficult enough to explore inland; but the exploration of the coast is a job that must have given the map-makers a nightmare. My blessings and best wishes to the visitor who attempts it; I can put him down in at least ten places a mile from the sea and say with perfect confidence, "Two pints if you reach the shore in less than one hour," knowing full well that by the time he has got there he will be needing those pints more than ever in his life before and that he won't have won them. If I start him off in some pleasant and seemingly purposeful lane, he will probably discover that it doesn't lead to the coast at all and will miss the only turning which does; and should he try to emulate the crow, he will find himself foiled by a marsh which he cannot hope to cross unless he borrows the bird's wings. But although the lie of the

country will reduce him to a state of impotent confusion, I shall be surprised if he doesn't find in it something worthy of real admiration. On the Suffolk coast there is every type of land known in England, all jumbled together and fitting into a quite irregular pattern. The only type that is at all constant is the marsh, which runs continuously from one end to the other; if you have no love of marshes, then I advise you to spend your holiday elsewhere. For myself, I can never see enough of them. But don't think that these marshes are monotonous; sometimes they are a mere strip behind the foreshore, sometimes they curve inland like a great bay. And when they run down the coast in a broad sweep they are intersected by thick woods, by rivers, great or small, flowing parallel to the sea, as does the Alde, or entering it direct, without any mazy motions.

But of all the country that surrounds the marshes the best is the heath. A heath, to my mind, is never dull; it is the land of eternal change. Under the grey skies of winter it is wild and forlorn, exciting and slightly antagonistic; in spring and summer it is a warm, welcoming landscape of ever-deepening colours, brown, yellow, purple and green. And the scents of the heath are scarcely the same for more than two weeks on end; what a difference, for instance, between the fresh smell of vigorous green bracken in early summer and the thick, musty odour that seems to press up from the damp earth on a bleak mid-winter's afternoon. I love these Suffolk heathlands; I never walk on them without feeling something new, not necessarily something that I have not noticed before, but some definite quickening of the atmosphere,

perhaps because the life on the heath is more vital, more perceptible, more changeful than that on any other country.

In shape and in placing the Suffolk heaths are even more irregular than the marshes themselves. Some stretches are quite flat, others are furrowed with twisting vallcys or pitted with basins as round and as deep as the Devil's Punch-Bowl. At times they will lead you far inland and then, turning back, will take you to the very edge of the sea; at times they will narrow down almost to extinction, broadening out again in a moment beyond a line of trees or a curve in the river. Their direction is so deceptive that they are never easy to follow for more than a couple of miles on end; but I think it is hardly an exaggeration to say that anyone walking from Southwold to Bawdsey could, if he knew his way about, keep to the heaths for at least three-quarters of the entire distance.

Yes, if he knew his way about; and if he did not, then he would probably never get to Bawdsey at all, even with the blood and agony of the map-makers to assist him. For the Suffolk coast-line is wild, lonely and unspoiled, and therein lies its beauty. Ever since the sea went back and marshes and heaths gradually broke in upon the line of the mighty primeval forests that had towered up in the wake of it, the essential nature of the coast country has hardly changed. The spirit of it, the look of it, are to-day just as they were when East Anglia was in thrall to the first Norman King. That, at least, is the feeling it gives me; the sense of everlasting loneliness is almost as deeply inherent on the coast as on the Breckland;

and if it is possible to feel the nature of it so strongly and sincerely, then what does it matter how many changes have taken place in the actual appearance of the coast?

For it has changed. Of course it has; there is no fifty miles of English country that has not. Nature as much as man has altered the Suffolk coast-line, but neither has harmed its beauty in the least.

The hand of man becomes daily more insidious. There seems no limit to the damage it can do. But the changes it has wrought upon the Suffolk shores are negligible; had it not been for the intractable marshes, the contortions of the rivers, the impossible lay-out of the country, I might be writing a very different story. As it is, the hand is stayed at almost every turn: it can creep inland, perhaps, if it picks its way with care, but along the shore it cannot stray very far, not with all its ruthless artifice, and if it could, the rewards would not be worth the trouble.

Only in two places has building really encroached upon the coast: at Felixstowe and at Lowestoft. Felixstowe's rise to fame must be the envy of many a seaside borough councillor, for sixty years ago it was a village of barely a thousand inhabitants and to-day it is a large and popular resort. What set the match to such a dazzling flame? Probably a combination of the railway and the Suffolk air. And I have no complaints to make; if ever I feel the urge to visit a resort, I shall go to Felixstowe. It is excellently laid out, its gardens and its terraces are a tribute to their overseers, and its views from Woodbridge Haven to Landguard Fort, almost from Deben to Orwell, are some of the finest on the coast. Felixstowe has engulfed

very little of its immediate surroundings, but I must admit that I got a bad fright a short while ago when the lovely six-thousand-acre estate of Woolverstone Hall, close to Pin Mill, came into the market. I watched with anger and despair while those greedy brutes, the speculators, hovered around it like vultures over a corpse, seeing no doubt the first link in a possible chain to Felixstowe on the other side of the river. They hovered too long. Lord Nuffield, to whom his country already owed a debt too great for gratitude to pay, bought the whole estate as yet another gift to Oxford University, and the speculators' dream dissolved again into the shades to which it belonged, leaving that promontory between the Orwell and the Stour still free from blemish.

I praise Felixstowe for its pride and its good sense, but it does not really enter into my conception of Suffolk. Nor, for that matter, does Lowestoft, by far the most important place on our coast. My thoughts are for the country, for the village, not for the ever-spreading town. I have been told that in the last hundred years Lowestoft has increased its population almost sevenfold, and for its enterprise I admire it. But success has made Lowestoft too large; the new town has swallowed up the old and, judging by what is left of the latter, such as the colony of pebble-built and red-roofed cottages near the Ness, I cannot but be sorry for the change. Still, the industry that is the backbone of Lowestoft, and has been ever since the fifteenth century, when Yarmouth and Lowestoft first came to blows over it, is a fascinating and romantic one: long life to the fisheries, and a happier one than they are enjoying now. There is hardly a

day in the whole year when fish are not landed at the Trawl Market, be they plaice, turbot, sole, cod or skate. No doubt many a summer visitor thinks he is seeing the game at its height; but let him wait till the crisp mornings of late autumn, and fish will swim in his head and linger about his nostrils for the rest of his life. The largest fleet of herring-drifters in the kingdom gliding smoothly back to harbour; the uncouth yelling of the fishermen across the docks; the Lowestoft wives, augmented by that famous institution, the "Scottish lassies", wallowing through the reeking, slippery heaps of mackerel and herring in the markets—it is for these incomparable scenes that I like Lowestoft, and for something grand and proud in the labour and simplicity of it all.

But Lowestoft straggles; yes, undeniably it straggles. That it should reach out for Yarmouth is inevitable; but then it straggles to the southward, too, so far along the main road that it has quite absorbed the remnants of the little village of Pakefield.

And yet no sooner has the long arm of Lowestoft reached its limit than man and his works vanish off the face of the earth. That is the wonder of this coast. If I were to deposit you at random on the stretch between Kessingland and Southwold, a semicircle bounded by the main road, and tell you that there was probably more noise and activity going on within a radius of half a dozen miles than anywhere else in the whole county, you would be minded to kick me into the sea as a man with a tedious sense of humour. Yet it is so; and the mastery of nature over man, the transition from commotion to solitude, is as sudden and complete as the awakening from Purgatory to Paradise.

There is an old Suffolk rhyme, penned long ago by some fellow of little education and no refinement, which says:

Between Cowhithe and merry Cossingland  
The devil shit Benacre, look where it stand!

If this came from Cossingland itself, as I suspect, then it is sheer impudence. From an intimate knowledge of both places I can say that the devil had nothing whatever to do with the making of Benacre, but that he may very well have given assistance in the construction of Kessingland. A dismal place, colourless and unattractively developed, a pimple on the fair face of the coast and undoubtedly a product of Satan. But Benacre is quite otherwise; secluded, unobtrusive, almost lost in heath, wood and large arable fields on the high land behind the shore. "Thass hard to see where that *dew* stand, boy, thass a tittley little place, ony a charch an a few ould cottages, Lor that on't hart nobuddy that on't." Once go beyond Benacre and you may have difficulty in getting back, for all this country is a maze of track-ways, most of which seem to serve no purpose at all. The thought of a main road a mile or two behind you is absurd. Easton Broad, for instance, a sheltered piece of water barely separated from the sea and lying less than half a mile from the road to Southwold, is one of the quietest and most deserted places in Suffolk.

When I spoke a short while back of the "remnants" of Pakefield, you wondered no doubt what I meant. This brings me to the explanation of my remark that nature as much as man has altered the Suffolk coast:

not altered its beauty, but something even more vital—its safety. Yes, in Suffolk we are at odds with nature: we are pitted against that most cruel and impulsive of enemies, the sea.

Oh, so slowly does it beleaguer us! Could you see it in summer, drawling up the beach, brushing the shingle with coquettish lips, so gentle, so harmless, so indolent, you would scoff at the idea of evil lurking in that serene and imperturbable bosom. But come to it in winter, when the same innocent sluggard is grey and cold, when the great white waves come driving in to crash and snarl against the shore, when the fishermen stand helpless on the beach beside their little boats and the wildfowl chatter uneasily in the safety of the rivers and the marshes—come back to Suffolk then, and see how dreadful is the change from meekness to ferocity. Edward FitzGerald once said: “There is no sea like the Aldeburgh sea. It *talks* to me.” I’ve no doubt that there were times when it roared at him, too.

The devastation known as coast erosion has been going on for hundreds of years. I believe that a disaster was first recorded in the time of Edward the Confessor. That is one of the terrors of it: it is as slow, as fraught with the tortures of suspense as is the dragging inevitability of a cancer. Awful to think that a thousand years ago our ancestors struggled against it, succumbed to it, just as to-day we struggle and just as we succumb. Those hardy Suffolk men, were they not driven from their homes, did not their towns and villages crumble about them and go crashing down into the glutinous waves—towns and villages that have never been rebuilt? What could they do? They

fought, they cursed, they strained their brawny shoulders to the breach, but what could they do? They could only retreat and watch their dear creations torn into ugly, shapeless lumps of brick and stone, half buried beneath the sea. And what can we do? Nothing, it seems. We are as impotent as they.

As a continuous encroachment it is hardly noticeable. For fifty years, perhaps, the North Sea will appear as innocuous as a lily-pond in summer, and the scare of erosion will die away until an irresponsible generation has forgotten it altogether. And then it will come again, suddenly, furiously, with the sea storming up the shore—and there will be nothing to stop it.

Erosion came last year—and it came as a veritable flood. In February I went to Minsmere marshes: they didn't exist. In their place was a huge lake that lapped about the edges of the woods on Westleton heath, two feet of salt water which killed every living thing that could not get out of its way—trees, fish and thousands of rats. It did not stay for long; the sluice was opened and it went gracefully back, leaving a surface of sand and shingle on the marshes and a gaping breach in the sea wall to be repaired by a gang of workmen. The poor sea wall—what a pitiful defence!

I went to Aldeburgh, where the sea washed over the High Street, obliterated the road to Slaughden Quay, and put the last touches to the destruction of that lonely red-brick house on the shore in a dark corner of which Bob the fisherman used to boast that he was born. I saw the lake that covered the town marshes teeming with flocks of widgeon, and

heard the worthies cursing because the shooting season had closed less than a week before—their homes and their land might be in peril, but to those sturdy sportsmen wildfowling came first. At the far end of the marsh the sea and the river struggled to reach each other: a few inches of river wall kept them apart. Had they once come together, God knows what would have happened. The wall held at Aldeburgh, but not at Iken. I went to Iken in August, intending to walk over the lovely marsh stretching up to Snape bridge; I found it a brown, filthy, stagnant, stinking swamp, a muddy morass of leering, oily pools, at the back of which sprawled the ancient trees on the edge of the wood, gaunt and misshapen and hideously naked. Why, I wondered, had the good people of Iken not let the water out, chased it out, forced it out? I found that I wronged them. They had chased it out. And every time they chased it out it came rushing in again through a hopeless gap in the wall, until they gave up in despair and waited for the fury to subside. Then they set about repairing the breach, and they were still doing it in the middle of the following winter. For a hundred yards inland at this point the ground was strewn with grotesque, rock-like lumps of mud which the force of the tide had torn up from the bed of the river and hurled through the breach. From end to end the poor marsh looked like a battlefield after some annihilating bombardment.

Thus it was all down the coast. Southwold, I was told, though I did not see it, was a perfect island, stranded by the flooding of the Blyth behind and below it and the onslaught of the sea above.

But I did see Horsey in Norfolk; I saw not the six

miles of sea water, but something worse, the tragedy and destruction scattered in the wake of it—the finest fields in Norfolk pitifully wasted, cottages gutted and abandoned, great heaps of rotting fish, windmills peeping absurdly from some still aggravated portion of the flood, farms and their buildings doomed as surely as if the dreaded mark of the plague had been written on their doors. And I saw, too, that chasm of a gap in the sea wall. Oh! they worked at it all right, when it was too late. All day, all night, with sand, turf, wood, concrete, piles—anything to close the breach, while they prayed for the north-west gale to die away before moon and tide should reach the full. And two nights later the gale rose to hell-born force; the sea, driven down to the Straits of Dover, found no passage there, and came roaring back to vent its rage on Horsey. Down went those wretched bulwarks like wheat before a giant's reaper, and in rushed the full torrent of the flood. So it went on, time after time, while reinforcements from all over the county hurled their strength into that fight of desperate and useless agony, and the deserted village of Horsey cried for mercy from the insatiate plunderer. Eight months later Major Anthony Buxton, the chief landowner, described the village and its marshes as looking like "a red-brown salt desert on the shores of the Dead Sea".

Well, and what can we do about it? Perhaps in a thousand years, perhaps in five hundred, perhaps even in fifty, if last year's performance should repeat itself with catastrophic speed, the whole of the Norfolk and Suffolk coast, one of the loveliest in England, will have disappeared down the gullet of its original owner,

who has been hungering for it ever since he disgorged it centuries ago. And ever since that time we have been searching for something to combat his greed—and we have found nothing. Brains and money, both of which have been used in fair measure, are a mighty combination, but the sea is mightier still. Everything that cunning has suggested and money has achieved has been beaten down by brute force. Yet has not man conquered all things against which he has set his hand, and is there surely not some answer to this problem as to all others? I can only pray that that answer will be found before the century is out.

It is a terrible thing, this erosion. The harbours at Easton, Dunwich and Minsmere have been lost for ever, while those at Orford and Bawdsey are now shallow, shifting and almost useless. Southwold harbour, too, was doomed in the same way, until a year or two ago a scheme was launched for dredging it and strengthening its rotted piers. Even the troubles of last spring could not upset local skill and enthusiasm. Southwold now has a fine harbour once more, and may Neptune respect such courage and enterprise.

To think that the Suffolk ports were once so strong that in the time of Elizabeth they supplied between them one-seventh of the British Fleet! Never a battle on the sea but Suffolk was in it, never a fleet put out but Suffolk ships with Suffolk men came ploughing from their harbours to swell the dipping ranks of stiff white sail. Great fights there were off the Suffolk shores, too; the worst of the Dutch Wars were concentrated in this area of the North Sea, and Suffolk went through fierce and desperate times.

For twenty years or so battles raged up and down

this coast; the resources and endurance of the dour East Anglians were taxed so drastically that they were soon divided between terror of the Press Gang and of the Dutch pirates. As if they had not already enough to bear, sick and wounded, even the great Blake himself, were landed in thousands until the Suffolk ports groaned with the weight of them. By heaven, what wars were these! Not until 1674 was the final peace made, and then not so much between victor and vanquished as between two nations gasping in the extremities of sheer exhaustion.

But before this, on 28th May, 1672, there had been the most tremendous battle of all—at Sole Bay off Southwold. For nearly a week the combined fleets of the French and English—36 of the former and 65 of the latter, ours being under the Duke of York and the Earl of Sandwich—lay at anchor in three lines between Easton and Minsmere cliffs, a distance of close on seven miles. On the very eve of the battle, either through confidence or boredom, half the men were carousing aboard and on shore. In the middle of the night of the 27th the wind changed from north to south-east and De Ruyter, with his 91 men-of-war, his fireships and his tenders, came in upon us while we were still at anchor and hopelessly unprepared. We at once fell into such a muddle that our fleet was divided; the French, harried by the Dutch Admiral Bankert, sheered off and left us to face De Ruyter alone. Face him we did, for about fourteen hours, until on the evening of the 28th the wind came from the shore again and carried the struggling fleets out to sea in a haze of smoke. De Ruyter himself was wounded, his vice-admiral was killed and three of his

ships were lost. As for us, we lost six ships in all. The flagship of the Earl of Sandwich, the mighty *Royal James*, after being boarded by one of the Dutchmen, was fired, and at the last moment the brave Earl won immortal honour by springing through the flames into the sea. Imagine living in Southwold at that time, with the roar and crash of the guns bursting through your head; if the guns could be heard in London, as I believe they were, how fearful and portentous must the noise have sounded to the poor people of Southwold, knowing that much of their manhood would be brought back to them maimed and shattered, and that much would never be brought back at all. Was the victory with the English or with the Dutch? Even to-day historians are doubtful upon that question. But it was certainly a dire and dreadful struggle, and I wish I had been upon Dunwich cliffs to see it.

And now not only have the harbours silted up and disappeared, bringing the fisheries and shipping of the towns to a dismal end, but many of the towns themselves have toppled long ago to premature destruction. Pakefield, Covehithe, Easton Bavents—these hardly exist at all. Go to Covehithe, for instance; all that you will find are a few cottages on top of the cliff, and beside them the ruins of a tremendous church. It is an amazing skeleton, this, and almost perfect: a huge tower, the walls of the aisles with their tall, elegant windows, and in the crumbling wall of the chancel one of the largest windows I have ever seen in a parish church. The only place I know comparable to this is Walberswick, where the church, a ruin whose tower was restored forty years ago, is over

one hundred and twenty feet in length. At both Covehithe and Walberswick little churches have been built within the ruins of those mighty ones, which make the skeletons more weird and fantastic than ever. Covehithe church is as plain and small as a village meeting-room, and it takes up less than half of the original nave.

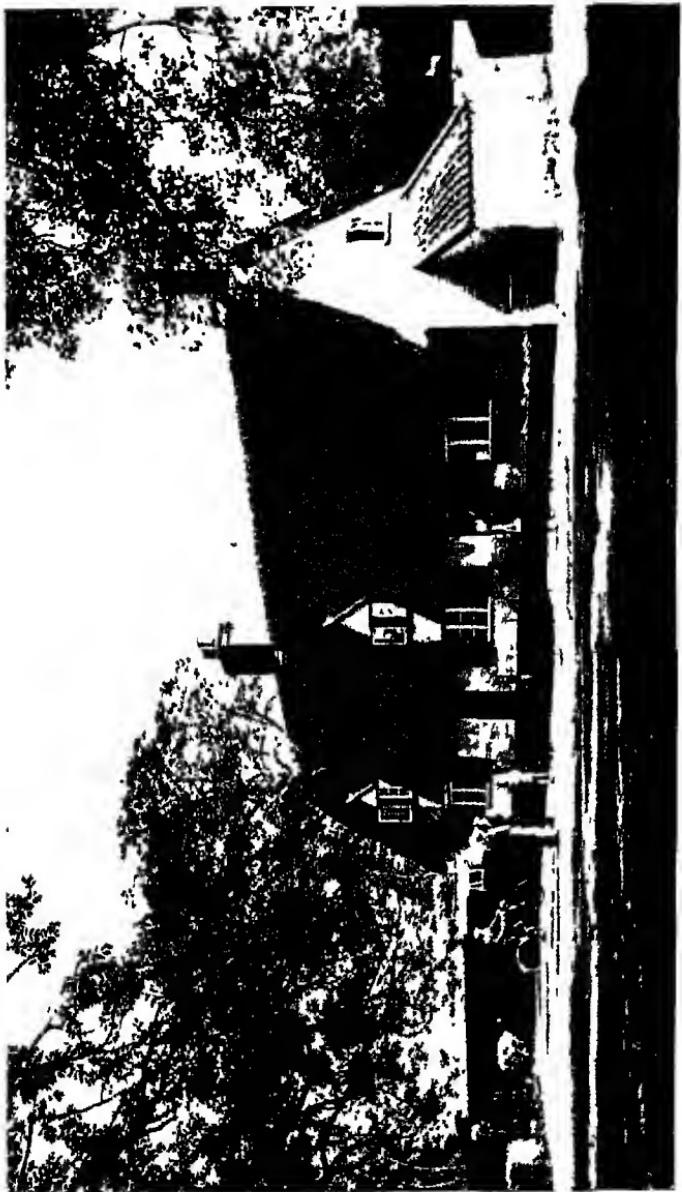
At every town or village on the coast I could stop to tell you the same tragic story. Blythburgh and Walberswick (I have never yet met a Suffolk man who could pronounce that name) were both places of pride and prosperity in the old days. What is left of them now? Walberswick, with the few old cottages clustering round the quay, has known such startling popularity of recent years that it is almost a modern village; artists, authors and actors have seized upon it, re-fashioned its old houses and surrounded it with new ones. But at Blythburgh there is nothing save the finest church in east Suffolk. The river Blyth, which once ran into the sea at Dunwich, silted up until it flowed out at Walberswick; the fishery declined, and fire and tempest set the seal on Blythburgh's destruction. Fire was a fearful thing in those days, an even worse enemy than the sea; in 1749 it ruined Walberswick entirely, and in 1659 it wreaked £40,000 worth of damage at Southwold.

Orford, Bawdsey, Aldeburgh, the sea has gnawed the heart from all of them; and on poor Dunwich, once the greatest city on the coast, it has gorged itself, devouring not the heart alone, but the whole lovely body. The history of Dunwich has provided the needy author with more copy than anything in East Anglia, and for the moment I will leave it at that.

Although erosion has not damaged one whit the beauty of the coast—save for a hint here and there, such as the great ruin of Covehithe church and the new concrete wall at Kessingland, the visitor would not know of its existence—but has added to its wildness a spirit of dignity and glory, this tale of woe is already too heavy. Let us look at something happier.

Some of these towns, whose old frontages have been destroyed by the sea, have risen to higher things on the stepping-stones of their adversity, for as fast as the original houses have succumbed to the inevitable pressure, new ones have appeared where the sluggish advance of the enemy will not reach them for hundreds of years. It is much the same principle as that of evacuating the doomed trenches for the supporting line; but the idea has been extended until (as at Walberswick) a network of supporting trenches now comprises almost all the defenders' area behind the battlefield.

Southwold is the best example of this expansion, and a very pleasant place it is. I do not know how badly the old town ever suffered from erosion, but I fancy that it has been more fortunate than most. At any rate, it has always had a harbour of some sort, whose piers, however decayed they may have been, must have acted as groynes. And now the rejuvenation of the harbour and the strengthening of the piers will not only prove a magnet to visitors, but will also, if properly looked after, be the town's salvation against the plundering of the sea for evermore. No place more thoroughly deserves its rewards. Southwold, like Felixstowe, has been developed sensibly and decently, and it is one of the quietest and most attractive "holi-



A WAYSIDE PUB

A thatched pub in Suffolk is very unusual. This is probably a double cottage converted

C. de Paula



day towns" you could wish to find. Don't think that it is entirely modern. Far from it; the old is nicely blended with the new.

Aldeburgh is another place that has grown enormously in a very short while, and I wish I could write of it in the same way. But I knew Aldeburgh intimately long before real expansion was ever thought of, when a "new" house here and there was hardly noticeable. Up till a few years ago its expansion was something very slow and lethargic. An old friend of mine has often told me that he can remember the days when most of the houses between the town steps and the golf club, which are now the main residential quarter of the town, did not exist at all. And before that again Aldeburgh was quite a different place. Heaven knows how much of the old town has been accounted for by the sea; but the Mariners' Inn at Slaughden and everything east of that extraordinary building, the Moot Hall, has gone, including the whole of the Market Place. I have heard that there is somewhere a sixteenth-century map which marks the church (a grand church it is, too) as being ten times farther from the sea than it is at present. That alone will show you how appalling have been the inroads of the sea. So Aldeburgh, the port which sent the *Marygold* to fight against the Armada and at about the same time could boast of more than a thousand fishermen and more than a hundred merchant seamen, fell into comparative decay. It became a perfect example of the Rotten Borough and settled down to await the time when the sea should consume it altogether.

Now, I hold no brief for stagnation; but I must confess that Aldeburgh was, to my mind, a far more

pleasant place fifteen years ago than it is to-day. A good beach, beautiful country, a romantic river designed by providence for sailing, fishing and shooting—these things may bring prosperity, but more often than not in these days that prosperity is exploited in a cheap, careless manner which relegates æstheticism to the ash-can. It breaks my heart to say anything against Aldeburgh; unfortunately, it also broke my heart to see those two houses on the river bank which I referred to in the last chapter, and if I am to write about the town at all, then I must speak my mind.

Yes, I knew Aldeburgh too well, and when I knew it I was devoted to it. Spratting and shooting in the winter with Harry and Bob, sailing and swimming in the spring and summer—those and many others were the things for which I loved Aldeburgh. Not that I cannot still enjoy them, but—well, if someone were to offer me to-morrow the finest house in the town, I would refuse it. I will say this, however: I have met many people who have visited Aldeburgh lately, and all have thought it one of the most delightful places they have ever seen. If I had never known it before, I should probably be quite as enthusiastic, which seems to prove that my feelings are due to my own prejudice. I hope they are.

All this must sound like a complete denial of that natural beauty and wildness which I put before you as the true fascination of the Suffolk coast. But then you must remember that there are only four places of any size or importance on all the fifty miles of coastline.

Whatever expansion there has been—and no matter how you look at it, the amount is negligible

—has not affected in the very least either the coast-line or the country behind it. To get away from the coast towns is as easy as walking through your own back door to get into the garden. In the case of Aldeburgh the country is protected for all time by the river; and for charm of loneliness I know nothing to equal that stretch south and west of the Alde, between Iken and Bawdsey. It is a wonderful mixture of country, this: heath, reaching far inland, covers the greatest part of it, and the flat land beside the river is entirely marsh, so that arable has to squeeze in wherever it can steal something from these two. It is lonely without being desolate, and is perhaps too open to be the wildest country in Suffolk—I think that honour belongs to the land south of the Waveney—but it compresses into a dozen miles everything that is best in the county, and you will find here the complement to every mood and taste.

There are a great number of woods on this stretch; once, I suppose, they must all have been linked together in one gigantic forest; but I prefer them as they are, scattered, irregular and small enough to add to the variety of the country without overriding it. Most of these woods are oak, and you can get some idea of the age of the trees from the vast size of them. I had never given much thought to the age of trees until a short while ago I visited the Guildhall at Lavenham. I was being shown round by the caretaker, and when we came to the dungeon he pointed to the largest beam I had ever seen and asked: “How old do you suppose that is?” I ran my not very expert eye down that colossal piece of timber—at least two feet square and possibly forty feet long. In my ignorance I hazarded

a guess of about a thousand years, at which the caretaker laughed indulgently. "Why, man," said he, "this place itself is six hundred years old. Now, to get a beam of that length and straightness and thickness would only be possible if the tree had been growing for pretty near a thousand years. And then with the methods they used in those days (a long sight better than the ones we use now) anything up to a hundred years would be needed for the seasoning of it. So altogether I should put it at between fifteen and seventeen hundred." I must bear this formula in mind when next I go to Suffolk's prize wood, the Druidic Forest, which lies in the middle of the heath a little way outside Butley. There are trees there which would rival even that giant beam at Lavenham. Actually I believe that the oldest oak growing in the county is the Gospel Oak at Polstead; it is said to have stood for more than thirteen hundred years, and although it collapsed some while ago it was still in leaf when I saw it last year. The Butley forest is mostly oak, ash and holly, which were the three sacred trees in pagan days; hence the reason for believing that it is really Druidic, although, of course, the present trees are but the distant offspring of the original ones. It is a most eerie place, this, very dense and oppressive, apt to scare the imaginative even in the brightest and broadest daylight.

On these heaths between Iken and Hollesley the Forestry Commission has been at work, not, I am glad to say, in the same intensive, crushing, all-powerful way as on the Breckland, but on a scale that is perfectly reasonable and moderate. Ten thousand acres, I think, is about the area that has been planted; not

planted solid, but at intervals and in isolated patches. I like it. These thick, neat plantations, provided they are not too large, give a definite design to the view in an undulating country, and their deep, soft shade of green is adaptable enough to be always in tune with the heathland colours, no matter what the weather or season.

There is nothing very outstanding about the villages of this country, and for that reason they are all the more pleasant. They are very small and very difficult to find; some of them, like Gedgrave, a tiny place lying in a cul-de-sac between Butley Creek and the river Ore, are too trivial even to be honoured with a church, which in Suffolk is the hall-mark not of impiety but of unimportance. There are, however, one or two places not only of great beauty, but also of real historical and antiquarian interest, the very last qualities you would expect to find in these lonely little villages; but then in Suffolk the best things are always unexpected, and that is half their charm. The Priory at Butley, for instance, is almost as elusive as Elmham Minster; but when you do find it, however footsore and frantic you may be, the very solitude of the place is probably what will attract you most. Like all such buildings, the greater part of it has crumbled long ago into nothingness; but the gatehouse, which has been lived in ever since the eighteenth century, is as fine and as solid as in the days when the Priory was prosperous and important. Until a few years ago it was used as the vicarage, and it has now been restored with the greatest care and thoroughness. The façade of this gatehouse will astonish you; on it are carved thirty-five heraldic shields in five rows of seven each. There

is one other thing about Butley that will interest those who followed the dubious fortunes of the de la Poles which I wrote of in the last chapter: Michael de la Pole, slain at Agincourt, was buried in the church here.

The key place of all this district was, and still is, the village of Orford, in many ways the most delightful village on the coast. In these days it is almost an insult to call any village picturesque; but that word really and truly describes the wide, friendly street of Orford, lined with old cottages, which runs down to the quay. Orford has a great air of individuality, and there is something very contented about it, although the sea long ago extinguished all its claims to glory and reduced it to the verge of ruin. If it is possible to compare a church to a castle, then I am hard put to it to know which I prefer at Orford. The church is a huge place, partly restored, but still very crumbled and decayed. All the churches on the coast are grand and impressive, whether ruined or restored; but I have always had a special love for this one above all others. Mouldering, dilapidated, but still with a look which I can only describe as cheerful, a sort of happy medium between the gauntness of Covehithe and the glory of Blythburgh, it is somehow symbolic of the whole story of Orford's fortunes. The tower is much decayed, the chancel (once a jewel of Norman architecture, I believe) only exists as a ruin projecting on to the graveyard; not much more than half the original church is now in use; yet it has managed to preserve a spirit of great composure, of enjoyable and weather-beaten senility, just as have the ancient fishermen who sun themselves outside the "Jolly Sailor".

As to Orford castle, all that is left of it is the great

stone keep, four-storied and nearly a hundred feet high. It is rather a lonely place, standing grim and rugged on a large mound in the middle of a field. But then it was built for a grim and unenviable purpose—as a bandog ready to be slipped against that outrageous fellow, Hugh Bigod of Framlingham. Bigod had three castles in Suffolk. Framlingham and Bungay I have already spoken of; the third, Walton, which has gone under the sea long since, was only a dozen miles down the coast from Orford. Henry II seems to have thought that by keeping a garrison at Orford he could outwit Bigod in the matter of the landing of the Flemish army; he was drastically disillusioned, for the Flemings did land quite close to Orford, and what the garrison was doing I know not. However, as I have told elsewhere, Bigod and the Earl of Leicester, with their imported army, met with disaster at Fornham St. Genevieve, so that although the Orford garrison failed wretchedly in its object, the King had the last word for the moment. After this the bandog never remained long under one master; by devious ways it became the property of the Marquis of Hertford, the original of the Marquis of Steyne in *Vanity Fair*, who would have pulled it down had not the government intervened; and now, after centuries of changing ownership, it has come at last into the safe hands of the Nation.

Orford's story is almost as tragic as that of Dunwich. You can surely guess the gist of it by now, and I will not go into it in detail. This was a place of very great importance, a fine fishery and a port that sent many strong ships to the help of the English fleet; but gradually the sea worked in upon it until the harbour

was blocked up and destroyed altogether. What torture it must have been to the men of Orford to watch in impotent despair while their prosperity decayed before their very eyes, and to pass their lives in wondering whether their sons or their grandsons would be the first to feel the pangs of ruin! About all that is left to Orford now is an oyster-bed.

The Blyth once ran into the sea at Dunwich, but its mouth is now four miles to the northward, just above Walberswick. So complex are the workings of the sea that the Alde, which once ran out at Slaughden, behaved in precisely the opposite way; it turned southward and joined up with Orford's river, the Ore. And so for centurics these two have made one river running alongside the coast; but the sea, instead of leaving them as they are, is now trying to reclaim them for its own. The whole river is in jeopardy; each year the seaward side of the entrance moves a little farther back, and at Slaughden, too, the sea is eating through the shingle, as if it were trying to open once more the ancient mouth of the Alde. Heaven help the Alde and the Ore—it seems that no one else can.

Sea and river are separated by a strip of land which in some places is barely a couple of hundred yards wide. It is strange country, this, sand and shingle and stiff, spiky grass; a stretch more desolate and austere I have never found on the whole English coast. Man never goes there unless he must, for the fearful loneliness and the dull, deadening roar of the sea are too much even for the strongest nerves. In spring this place is a nesting-ground for thousands of birds, and their dismal wailing makes it seem more of a wilderness than ever.

And yet it has had its uses in the past. It was ideal for one thing—smuggling. There were probably more “bad cargoes” landed here than anywhere else in Suffolk, and that is saying a good deal, for this coast, with its rivers and creeks and long, lonely stretches, was a smugglers’ paradise from end to end.

They were a rum lot, the smugglers, a rum lot and a rough lot, too. If I were to rake up old stories, humorous and tragic, and to launch out into the ways and means and whereabouts of those hardy fellows who thought in terms of contraband, this book would run to two volumes. It is a limitless subject, and before you can appreciate the details of it you need some working knowledge of the coast; besides, all kinds of smuggling tales have been told already by people more competent than I am. Best of all is Richard Cobbold’s classic story of Margaret Catchpole. This book was my bible when I was young; I read it at least twice a year, and the tears I shed over poor Margaret’s two trials, Will Laud’s fearful battles up and down the coast and his death at the supreme moment of Margaret’s life, would well-nigh have flooded the river Alde. I read it again last year, and I must say that it wears extraordinarily well.

Cobbold brings in every detail of Suffolk smuggling: the famous cave at Bawdsey, the sinister, unscrupulous man who worked the smugglers like marionettes and made great fortunes from them, the way the “crops” were run in and the thousand ruses used to disperse them. Above all, he tells you something of the Preventive Servicemen, whose lives were even more dangerous and desperate than those of the smugglers. No wonder half of them were dismissed for drunken-

ness or for lending a hand in the very traffic they were meant to destroy; for lying buried in the sand for a day and half a night, while the wind turned your blood to ice, a smuggler's bullet through your heart or a smuggler's club across your skull was not a very tempting reward.

Yes, the smugglers were a rum lot. In character they were very like the old-time poachers; in fact, many of them were poachers when necessity kept them on land for any length of time. And, like the poacher, their success depended upon two essential virtues—wits and courage. The coward and the fool soon came to an inglorious end in the sea or on the gibbet or at the scut of their enemies.

I believe that at the "Jolly Sailor" at Orford there is one of the original handbills offering £50 reward for the capture of Margaret Catchpole after she had escaped from Ipswich gaol in March, 1800. It was only a few miles away, on Sudbourne Beach, that she was taken, while she and Will Laud were waiting for the boat which was to carry them to safety and happiness in Holland. Laud, in his last desperate stand, was shot dead by Edward Barry, the Coastguard officer, brother of the man whom Margaret was eventually to marry after her transportation to Australia. And on this same stretch of coast Laud's villainous henchman, John Luff, received his last wound in a shocking affray while he and his gang were trying to land a large cargo; it was in the shepherd's cottage on Havergate island (the very same one that had something to do with my own experiences in the last chapter) that "at last, with one wild scream, his spirit, like an affrighted bird, fled away".

Not one hundredth of our smuggling stories are told in *Margaret Catchpole*, but the best of them have found their way into papers and books at one time or another. They deal mostly with the hiding of cargoes. There was, for instance, that load of liquor at Coldfair Green which brought destruction upon its owners. It was left for some while deep in the ground under a rubbish heap, and the smugglers were so impatient when they came to get it out that two of them were suffocated by the foul air. Sometimes cargoes were hidden in ingenious ways in the boats themselves, sometimes in cottages and churches, while I have heard that one good lady kept a constant store of silk and spirits under the floor of the Meeting House at Leiston. In Rishangles church there was a hold under the pulpit, at Westhall there was one in the roof, and at Theberton (where the sixteen men of the German Zeppelin which was brought down in June, 1917, are buried) there was another under the altar.

The smuggler's prowess was on the wane a hundred years ago, and when in 1856 the old Preventive Service was reorganized as the Admiralty Coastguard, it very soon petered out altogether; and now the Coastguard itself is a travesty of its own name, for telephone, wireless and lifeboat station have well-nigh put it out of business. I suppose that in these days we can look back on smuggling as grand and romantic, for it has become as famous in legend as Arthur's Round Table or the Crusades; but it must really have been a brutal and desperate job, and the Suffolk shores are better off without it.

I should like to end this chapter by describing

my favourite part of the coast, and yet I find it very difficult to know what part that is. Is it the country of the Alde, the wide, labyrinthine marshes, the long heaths running down past Butley Creek almost to the shores of the Deben? This stretch has everything that I most need: it is lonely and beautiful and unspoiled. It is a country that you must walk in, get lost in, whose loveliness is rich, wild and changeful. Yes, I love all this; but I think that best of all I love two miles of country between Minsmere cliffs and the tiny settlement of East Bridge. All the beauty of the coast is concentrated in these two short miles: heath, wood, marsh, corn, river and sea. This is England's last offering; she can take you no farther, and farther you do not want to go.

The heaths here, known as the Westleton Walks—a name which always suggests to me poke-bonnets and Victorian Valentines—are the grandest I have ever seen. Their attraction lies, I think, in the shape of them and in their extraordinary variety: tracts of thick bracken suddenly change to tall scarps of heather, like the ridges left by some giant, primeval plough, furrowed with delicate and grassy valleys. Farther inland there is some real "breck" country, bare, stony fields lined with gaunt pines and visited only by rabbits and plovers; it is as desolate and sad as the Breckland itself, but it is no more than a very small wilderness in that splendid heath, and too oppressed to be oppressive. Minsmere marsh, bounded by the sea wall, is shaped like an outspread hand, the palm criss-crossed with dykes, the fingers winding in past great woods of oak and pine and fir to the narrow valleys of the scarps. This marsh has some curious

landmarks: a watermill, a windmill, and the flint walls of an ancient chapel standing on a high knoll above the river, the same river that is reduced to a humble drain when it passes my own garden ten miles inland.

I suppose I like this country so much because I know it almost better than any other part of Suffolk, and because I feel a kind of pride in having discovered the secrets of it. Innumerable secrets they are, and it has taken me years to explore them all. There is, for instance, the fox's earth, the only one I know of on the whole coast, high up on the side of a hill of heather. It is an open house for any homeless wanderer that cares to use it, and by keeping a careful eye upon it I have found that about once a year a solitary old dog-fox quietly takes over the tenancy. Perhaps it is a week, perhaps a month, before his arrival is discovered; perhaps it is another month before the gamekeepers and the men of Westleton, by a combination of brains, brawn and bigotry, have caught him. A fox is a rare and loathly object in east Suffolk; he raises more hullabaloo than a plague of caterpillars. The fox's life on Westleton Walks is something that I watch far more intensely than the European situation, and when I am away I receive a regular weekly bulletin of his doings. It is a mystery to me that fox after fox should make straight for this earth when it has lain deserted for months on end.

Even more mysterious and unusual is the coming of a badger. News of him sends me flying to the woods above the marsh, for heaven knows where he was the night before and where he will be the week after. Silent and secretive, he is away even before his lair

has been discovered, and only if you know every yard of the country can you get a glimpse of him at all. Generally he behaves himself on his visit, and his departure is blessed by the good wishes of the neighbourhood.

The otters live in Minsmere marsh all the year round. The marsh is such a maze of creeks, dykes, ponds and thick reed-beds that I have never yet succeeded in seeing them at work, though I have followed their tracks by the hour and have counted as many as fifteen eels and pike killed by the way. Once a year the otters are hunted, and on that day I stay away from Westleton, for otter-hunting is the only game (not sport) of its kind that leaves me freezing cold.

I have seen more birds at Minsmere than anywhere else except at Hickling in Norfolk. In the marshes I have watched among others geese, peregrines, harriers, bitterns and at least ten kinds of duck; on the heaths long-eared and short-eared owls, Norfolk plover and ringed plover. Last year two pairs of ringed plover actually nested on a gamekeeper's rearing-field, while the Norfolk plover were less than a hundred yards away in the heather. On summer nights the whole heath is astir with a sound that I love, a strange, deceptive sound—the purring and whirring and rattling of scores of nightjars. I once heard one of these "songs" last for just under seven minutes without one perceptible pause, and once, too, I heard a nightjar here in broad daylight.

Years ago I had a very curious friend at Minsmere, a character so extraordinary that it is hard to give him reality in a limited space.

As a boy I was given a very free hand in my daily life. If I went out long before breakfast, nobody asked questions; if I came in late at night, nobody scolded me. Provided that I attended my lessons and did not unduly disturb the culinary calendar I was allowed, very sensibly, to educate myself in my own natural way and to develop my instincts by the simple method of leaving them to lead me as they wished. The result was that before I reached my teens I had heard and seen a hundred odd things which many men seek unsuccessfully their whole lives through. Nothing is so receptive as the mind of a child, eager, unmoulded, free from the trammels of convention, and so far as opportunity went I was probably more fortunate than most.

Even at that early age I had a great fondness for the piece of coast that I have just been describing. Something in its wildness attracted me, something in its combination of heath and marsh and sea stirred me with the grand majesty of loneliness. I felt that all things mysterious and exciting were within my grasp around this abandoned shore. And so I explored it by day and by night, and came to know it in all the amazing changes of weather and of season.

One winter's evening I went down to the foreshore in a gale of wind and spent two chilly hours standing at the elbow of a local warrior who wielded his gun with huge enthusiasm and an almost complete lack of success. The moon was very strong and the duck, restless and bewildered, came battling in against the wind, some of them only "man-height". It was a long flight and a grand one, but the warrior's keenness utterly disorganized his aim. "Well," he

said at last, "I'm now a gooin hoom to git me a pair o' spestercles," and he trudged away up the shore, cheerful to the end. I began to wander in the opposite direction, and had gone perhaps two hundred yards when I saw in the clear moonlight the figure of a man crouching against a sand-dune. This puzzled me, for although a number of duck had crossed the shore at that point, I had heard no shots; I thought, however, that the roaring of the wind might have drowned them. The man was some distance away, and as I neared him I shouted in a loud voice: "Had any luck?" He gave no answer, so I approached to within a few yards of him and shouted again. The man did not move; he appeared to be quite unaware of my presence, and I now saw that he was staring across the bright sea with the tense, inflexible expression of a pointing dog. A mighty keen sportsman, I reflected. I stood beside him and said in a knowledgeable way: "It's all right, you know, you won't get any more to-night, they're all in the marshes long ago." I then looked down and noticed with surprise that he wasn't even carrying a gun. Slowly he turned his head and looked at me, rising off his knees until he stood over me at his full height; I thought him a strange and uncouth fellow, with his long, matted hair tossed by the wind and his black beard straggling down over his seaman's jersey. But what struck me most was the expression of his eyes, which were dark and hard and dilated; they were the eyes of a man caught in the act of murder, fearful, angry, surprised, desperate. His whole body shook most terribly, and he muttered to himself strange words which the wind snatched from his trembling lips and whirled away into oblivion.

How long we stood thus, while I gazed up at him in bewilderment, I do not know; perhaps not more than thirty seconds. But he suddenly seized me by the shoulders, almost crushing my thin bones in his tremendous grip, and let loose a torrent of blasphemy, at the same time shaking me to and fro and glaring at me in a most furious manner—and then as suddenly his voice faltered and the chaos died out of his eyes. He sank down on the dune by which we were still standing and hid his face in his rough sleeve.

Had I not long been accustomed to every kind of unusual happening, I should no doubt have dashed for home then and there, shrieking out that a terrible fellow with horns and hooves and a swishing tail had come up out of the sea and tried to eat me. As it was, my childish mind was moved with a vast curiosity to get to the bottom of this surprising behaviour. Here, I told myself, was a man who appeared to be ill and who might very well be glad of my help if only I could make him understand what a harmless and friendly boy I was. And so I put my hand on his shoulder and began to comfort him as best I could—the gale rather took the balm out of my words—saying that I was sorry if I had angered him and asking what the trouble was and whether I could do anything for him.

I suppose he heard me. At any rate, he seemed to accept me, although he made no answer to what I was saying, but sat with his chin cupped in his right hand and his fingers groping uneasily at his beard, while he continued to stare moodily out to sea. All at once, while I was still talking to him, he jumped up and ran forward to the shore, where he stood with his back to me and his eyes shaded against the dipping moon.

I sat down on the dune to wait for his next move. I did not have to wait long, for by and by he began to pace backwards and forwards, going thirty yards up the shore, pausing for a moment and coming quickly past me again; finally he set off with great strides towards Minsmere cliffs, and I followed him, keeping among the dunes, jumping and running and gasping like a puppy in the wake of a trotting greyhound. All the while he walked right in the edge of the sea, and never once did he take his eyes from it.

The moon sank lower and lower, the sea became dark as a plate of silver scorched by a sudden flame, and the man in front of me came to a halt at last. He seemed to know that I had been following him, for he came straight across to me, as if he took my presence for granted, and said with a deep sigh: "Thass no good us a waitin na more. He on't come to-night." Without another word we set off across the marshes.

I thought it better not to ask him what he meant. I had by now decided that the poor man was out of his mind and that he was trying to summon the courage to drown himself. What other reason could there be for this restless pacing of the shore and this strange communion with the sea? Obviously it was my job to save him, and I determined to set about it in my own way, for the mystery of the whole affair had excited me and roused my sympathy. I therefore inquired with casual diplomacy whether I should find him there the following night, and he answered shortly, yes, if the moon were strong enough. When we reached the road I left him and went home to bed, much perplexed by the weird actions of this gaunt, unhappy man.

Next evening the wind blew as fiercely as ever; the clouds were so thin and moved so fast that the moon fought a way between them and was again very bright. I went early to the shore, thankful enough that as it was a Sunday there would be no wildfowlers to bother me; but of the stranger, too, there seemed to be no sign. It was not until I had patrolled the dunes for two hours or more, and had almost given up in despair, cursing myself for not having made a more definite assignation with him on this long, deserted shore, that I spied him standing in the edge of the tide.

This time he showed no surprise at seeing me; in fact, he scarcely seemed to notice me at all. Half blinded by the spray, I stood beside him, now watching the quivering of his mouth and the spasms that distorted his whole eager, drawn face, now following his gaze across the sea—on which I could see nothing, strain my eyes as I might. As I strove to keep my balance against the fury of the gale I decided that after all he had no intentions of suicide; there was something too anxious, almost expectant, in his behaviour; but then, in the name of heaven, what *was* he after? In a while there suddenly began the same procedure as on the previous night—the hurrying walk along the beach, with myself struggling at his elbow, tripping over the stones and splashing through the pools left by the tide. As I floundered behind him I felt that I must make some attempt to solve the whole enigma at the first opportunity.

That opportunity came unexpectedly. The wind, which had raged for thirty hours, began to die away, and at once the clouds thickened and came rolling blackly across the moon. We could see very little; but

for the thrashing of the surf we should hardly have known where the beach ended and the tide began. My companion's task, whatever it was, became hopeless; with a groan he turned inland, and together we sat down on the sea wall.

Although we had hardly exchanged a word, he needed no convincing by now that only a real wish to help him had brought me to the shore. The childish sincerity of my questions seemed to comfort and disarm him, for in a few moments he began to tell his story of his own accord and almost with gratitude.

Thirty years ago, soon after the death of his wife, he had quarrelled violently with his son, then a boy of fifteen. The son had wanted to go to sea, the father had wanted him to stay at home and learn the work of a fisherman. Their tempers were hasty and their wills were strong. The son had settled all arguments by walking out of the house. After a fortnight his father had begun to want him back; he did not worry then; he expected that he *would* come back, as soon as he got tired of looking for a boat. After a month he grew uneasy; he went so far as to inquire at some of the ports, but learned nothing. After a year he began to despair; he found himself waiting, thinking, longing, and as his hopes dissolved his longing increased.

That was thirty years ago. Of course, you have guessed it—his son never came back. And not only did he never come back, but he sent no friend, no present, no message even. For all that was known, he might have been killed the first day he left home, or he might now be a wealthy man in a distant land. But in his heart the father had always been convinced

of one thing: that the boy had succeeded in his original intention of going to sea.

Whether the father still hoped or whether after that first year he had given up all faith in his son's return, he scarcely knew. He grew lonely, he blamed himself. It became an obsession with him. He wept, he prayed and he yearned. Other people had forgotten that he ever had a son; he lived only to see that son again. That one desire was the centre of his whole melancholy life.

And then, a month ago, something had happened. He had had a dream. He saw his son as the captain of a Dutch cargo boat, a fine, tall fellow he was, too, and in his dark eyes was the same fire that had blazed so fiercely on that fatal morning thirty years before. They were coming down the North Sea for Flushing when they ran into a storm; the moon clouded over, the sea raged, the dreamer could see nothing. But in the darkness he heard a dreadful crash, and cries and groans smothered by the wind. And then the boat had disappeared, and the crew were in the water, half of them drowned, the rest swimming for Holland; but no, one of them had turned the other way, was heading for the English shore—his son. He watched him, alone in that frightful sea, struggling, gasping, for hours and hours and hours. The waves swamped him, the wind lashed him, and still he came on. He crawled to the edge of the tide and lay still. Before him were sand-dunes and a sea wall, above him were heathery cliffs. He had come home to Minsmere Haven.

The man woke up. The agony of the dream had left him strangely calm, and he opened his eyes with

the one clear thought that he must go at once to bring his son back from the shore. He did not need to look out of his window to see that the moon was high and bright, and he could hear the remnants of a storm far out over the sea. He threw on his clothes and hurried off to Minsmere.

All that night he walked the shore, and the next, and the next. While the moon lasted his hopes soared, but at length he was forced to abandon his watch. No matter, the moon would come again, and he told himself that dreams always spoke of the future and that he had only to wait for the prophecy to be fulfilled.

He had made sure that his son would return this time; the gale and the moon tallied so perfectly with his dream. He had worked himself into a state of madness. And now, though his disappointment was dreadful, his faith was as strong as ever. He was still certain that he had only to wait.

Sitting there on the sea wall I listened to this astounding story in a kind of trance. The force behind his words was so tremendous that I never doubted for an instant the reality of his dream. Whether or not I shared his belief in its fulfilment, heaven only knows. He never questioned me on that point; he took it for granted. I was impressionable, romantic, not long past the age when the ogres of Grimm's fairy-tales lurked round every corner. And, after all, sincerity and power have convinced the whole adult world of things far more fantastic than this poor man's dream. Time and again I have wondered whether I really believed that one day we should find his son upon the beach. There could have been no half measures

about it; either I did or I did not. If his own faith had wavered, mine would have collapsed at once; but his enthusiasm was so great that it swept all reason from my mind. The sheer impossibility of any man breasting the North Sea for so many miles in the full fury of a tempest was lost in the vivid conviction of the story.

We watched no more that month. Without the moon, he said, our task was hopeless. Firstly, we could see nothing. Secondly, the moon was an essential part of the dream, and to the dream he adhered in every detail. He began instead to initiate me into what was perhaps the most extraordinary and enjoyable life I have ever known—the life of the poacher.

If once I begin to touch on this I shall find it difficult to stop, and so I must leave it alone. Some day I think I shall write it in full, but the place is not here. The secrets that he taught me were the secrets of a different world, a world of which even the most ardent countryman is hardly conscious, and which is discovered perhaps by one man in ten thousand. The life I led at that time I look back upon not with shame or regret, but with amazement and gratitude.

That man was a genius. He had a genius for natural history, and he worked with all the attributes of the great artist—subtlety, imagination, a delight in perfection. He told me that he had taken up this mode of life soon after his son had left him, and into it he had thrown all the power and energy of a brain which grief had diverted from the normal stream.

Having me with him seemed in some measure to take his thoughts off his son, although I was always conscious of the agony and impatience that darkened

his mind. But when we were out together he was a different person—gentle, eager, humorous, while for a man of his years his strength and agility were astonishing. Only when the moon was drawing to the full did that fearful change come over him. Then he took me with him to the shore, and there began again those hours of torture and hope and despair, when my feelings rose almost to the madness of his own.

Nothing would make him give up. There was no gale this time, but he argued that for all we knew there might well be a storm raging over the North Sea beyond our sight and hearing. And so night after night we kept at our crazy vigil, and if there were any thoughts in my head at that time I have no remembrance of what they were. On the last night we saw some object floating in the sea, about three hundred yards from the shore. He gave one cry and, before I could stop him, had darted in and was swimming madly beyond the first breakers, whilst I ran up and down the edge of the tide and screamed to him to come back. I watched his head bobbing through the water; he reached the thing, whatever it was, touched it, paused a while and turned again for the shore. Slowly, wearily he came, now swimming a few strokes, now hanging listlessly on the tide, until at length he drifted near enough for me to face the freezing water (I was no great swimmer in those days) and pull him out. Shivering, half insensible, he staggered up the beach: and then he suddenly collapsed and lay sobbing as if his poor stricken spirit had succumbed at last. But still he did not give up hope.

Shortly after this I went away to school. Our

parting was touched with sadness, for our friendship had become very real and sincere. But I knew exactly the date on which I should be coming back, and accordingly we arranged the place and the very evening when we should meet.

I kept that assignation. He did not. Every night for a week I patrolled the beach, but he never came. I thought that he must be ill, and that I should easily find him if I made a few inquiries—and then I realized to my horror that I knew neither his name nor the village in which he lived. Desperately I set out to comb every hamlet between Aldeburgh and Southwold. I described him—a poacher, a man who had lost his son, an old man, tall and thin and bearded. I unwound every thread, I tracked down every clue. One and all they led me nowhere.

And so I never saw again that strange and tragic friend. Many weeks I spent in searching, many more in turning over in my mind every conceivable place to which he could have gone and every possible mischance that could have befallen him. It was not until years afterwards that I remembered that dreadful night when he had rushed into the sea.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DUCK, FISHERMEN AND MARSHES

WHEN I lived at Aldeburgh I used to lie awake at night listening to the curlews flying over the village. They seemed to have a route which passed directly above our house. Often as many as six flocks would come over together, heading northwards, and when their last calls had died away on the thin air I would gradually doze off in the long and even silence. "Curr-leek-leek, Curr-leek-leek-leek, Cu-r-r-r-r-leek"—they were coming south this time and, drowsy as I was, that shrill, bubbling whistle would send me rushing to the window to peer among the stars and catch the vague shapes as they swept over the hill and down towards the marshes. Then I would fall asleep wondering whether these were the same birds that passed and re-passed along that aerial road in the night, or whether by mutual agreement they were carrying on a system of exchange in the marshes up and down the coast.

Curlews are shy and mysterious, and I found them the most restless birds in the river. Even in winter they were always on the move, as if they couldn't be satisfied with the same place for very long, but must be up and away looking for something new. Night after night they went, wailing their frustration; but in April, when they left for their breeding-grounds and the flocks came over all night long, there was a purpose-

ful, almost triumphant feeling in those sharp voices. The notes were quicker and higher, and sometimes they lacked the hesitant, purring quaver altogether.

I never realized my ambition of taking a census of this spring passage of the curlews. Once I thought I counted five hundred in a single night, but I had to rely mostly on the voices, because they were gone so quickly that I had barely time to see whether the flocks consisted of five birds or of fifty. When at last I crawled into bed in the early hours my whole head rang with their crying, and I went on counting curlews in my sleep.

When I went to live inland I found that what I missed most of all was the calling of sea and marsh birds in the night. There is something sad and strange and lonely in the sudden, piercing voice that comes out of the darkness high above you, the voice of a bird travelling at sixty miles an hour, which, when next you hear it, is no more than a distant pipe drifting away over the sleeping village. By contrast with this the soothing hoot of the owl, the rattle of the nightjar, even the magic warble of the nightingale, seemed at first tame and unexciting. In my present home I have only heard a curlew three times at night, although I have once heard something which was unknown at Aldeburgh—a Norfolk plover, travelling to Westleton Heaths, I suppose. A most unlikely sound it was in the middle of that agricultural country, just a single high whistle even more despairing than the curlew's.

We were never without curlews at Aldeburgh, for every spring a few old spinsters and bachelors were left behind, and in pathetic solitude they remained with us throughout the hot summer. Independent

birds, these; far from keeping company together, they went out of their way to avoid one another, each patrolling his private and separate piece of territory or standing for hours on end in depressed contemplation of his own uninspiring section of mud, just as the old men on the beach used to gaze out to sea day after day with eyes that held neither hope nor meaning. Summer was a time of silence for the curlews; even the breeders returning in September came without the wild and urgent clamour that had kept me awake during the nights of their departure. Their arrival was so quiet and secretive that often I knew nothing of it until I awoke one morning to find them already gathered in small, uneasy knots up and down the river.

Not so with the widgeon, which began to come in soon after the curlews. We generally reckoned to see a few native birds, probably from the north of Scotland, before the end of September, and these brought a gleam to the wildfowler's eye; but when, about a fortnight later, the first invasion of foreign birds was reported, every man on the Suffolk coast who owned any kind of a gun was up and listening half the night. In a good year the widgeon would arrive in hundreds at a time, flying at a tremendous height, circling round and round to get their bearings before swishing down into the broad river, where they would herd together and splash and chatter till the first streaky light of dawn showed above the woods. The whistle of the drakes, rather like a "Phew!" of surprise, as they led their vast flocks back and forth between the village and the marshes, had a very different significance to the wistful calling of the curlews along their route over

our house. It meant that Bob would be hauling his three-quarter-pound punt-gun out of his shed, that Harry would be tinkering with the engine of his so-called motor-boat, and that on the first moonlit night I would probably get no sleep at all.

There is a fascination about wildfowling which is hard to communicate to anyone who has never had experience of it. It is not the ordinary thrill of sport, not the excitement of getting a "bag"; it is a fascination remote, mysterious, which comes from knowledge and perseverance and the ability to play a lone hand. The duck is a cunning bird: the fowler must be cunning, too. The duck knows every inch of the river: so must the fowler. And he must know how to take advantage of tide, moon, wind and snow. No one else can help him; no one else can teach him more than the shallowest groundwork. The arts and wiles of duck-shooting he must learn for himself, from his youth to his old age, with the eternal risk of being drowned, getting frostbite and double pneumonia, blowing himself up with a punt-gun, or dying a score of other sudden and violent deaths. And all for the sake of a few duck. But it's worth it; anyone who has the least understanding of its secrets will tell you that it's worth it. In a bad season I have been out four nights in seven without so much as getting a shot; that didn't matter; it was the beauty of the river at night, the scents and sounds of the marshes, the treacherous shine of the mud, the tremendous sense of intimacy and loneliness, that sent me out time after time when I knew that I should probably return empty-handed.

'In our extreme youth my brother and I placed

ourselves under the care of Harry and his father, Bob, and to their teaching we owed everything that we subsequently learned. They were fishermen by profession; but to them sprats, mackerel, plaice, turbot, salmon-trout and the rest were the necessities of life, while sailing and wildfowling were the pleasures of it. Of course, there was a bit of money in sailing—I believe that nowadays, with the yacht-club increased to about three times its former size, there is an absolute gold-mine in it—and as time went on there began to be a bit of money in wildfowling, too, provided by parties who came down to Slaughden Quay from London, Manchester, and even from Aberdeen. For the fame of these two as fowlers was not confined to the Suffolk coast alone. A certain feat of Bob's, when, gliding in one winter's night upon a great flock of widgeon sheltering from a storm in the bay under Little Japan, he bagged eighty-one with a single shot from that mighty cannon of his, soon found its way into the papers, and after that I heard him credited with deeds so impossible as to make him blush. People hailed him as a second Payne-Gallwey, they came down specially to look at him, and they found he was worth looking at.

Bob was one of the handsomest men I have ever seen. Anyone who wished to trace the physical connexion between the Suffolk coast-dwellers of to-day and the marauding Norsemen of more than a thousand years ago need have looked no farther than him. He was a pure and perfect Viking. Very tall, his slimness made him seem even taller; his shoulders were broad, his hips narrow, his legs long and slender, even when shrouded in thick, baggy thigh-boots. But more than

his proportions it was his features that singled him out as the finest man on the coast; they were strong, clear, bold, haughty, striking in every way and from every angle. The nose was steep and straight and sharp, the bridge very high, the tip on an exact level with the base of the nostrils, so that it stopped perfectly short of being a hook; the lips were thin and tight, firm without being hard; the jaw was long and curved, the chin pointed and slightly jutting; the cheek-bones were set high, with the skin drawn taut across them; the hair and eyebrows were thick and medium brown, the lashes of a length which, without being effeminate, rivalled those of the prettiest girl in the village; the eyes themselves, blue, clear, alert and always kindly, had become narrow from being kept half closed against wind and sleet and snow, and this, when Bob was standing sideways to you, gave them a distant effect, as if they were strained towards the horizon against a strong light; the face was thin and rather long, the skin from neck to forehead a clear reddish-brown, beaten and hardened by foul weather, quite smooth except at the corners of the eyes, where there were deep, criss-crossed furrows like the clawmarks of some little animal scratching in the sand.

This description rightly belongs to the past. Bob has been dead for many years. He was drowned when a new boat he was sailing capsized in the river during a summer storm. His passenger said afterwards that as the boat went over Bob slipped on the wet deck and struck his head a terrible blow on the bollard. He thought that Bob was unconscious before he reached the water; at any rate, he never saw him come to the surface. Bob was at that time about sixty years old.

Year by year his face became sharper and more bronzed, and thin lines began to draw down across his cheeks; but this only made him handsomer than ever, and he looked no more than thirty. He was the sort of man who never seems old until his hair turns white.

The tragedy of Bob's death shocked the whole of the village. Even those who had hardly known him felt that Aldeburgh had lost something vital and precious, for Bob was as much of an institution as the Mayor himself. Four hundred people attended his funeral; about eighty of these had no real connexion with Aldeburgh, but were gathered from all over East Anglia. This, I think, is a greater tribute to Bob than any that I can pay to his memory.

The effect of his father's death on poor Harry was pathetic. For a month he did no work at all; then he settled down with a new partner, one Joe, who on and off had been associated with him and his father in their various enterprises. Joe was a very different type. He was slight and thin—he used to say that he had never weighed more than eight stone in his whole life—and he looked as frail and brittle as a sick boy. In reality he was tough, wiry, hard as teak and possessed of an amazing vitality and strength of character. He could stand up to any man and any weather, he could work all the fishermen on the Quay to a standstill. He was restless, excitable, unstable and moody. One thing governed his every action and thought—religion. He lived on his faith, worked on it, fed on it; it led him blindly, just as he by his strength of will led most of those who came in contact with him. In looks he would have been wholly insignificant but for one thing—his eyes. In them was

reflected every mood of his dynamic nature. In a moment of passion, when his voice rose to a scream and his fists beat in the air, they would grow fierce and wild and hot; then his voice would break off in mid-sentence, and at once all the life and colour would ebb away from them till they became dark and brooding as a spent thunder-cloud. I always watched Joe's eyes. Those extraordinary changes used to remind me of a weasel.

Joe neither smoked nor drank nor swore nor poached. As Harry did at least two of these things—not all Joe's eloquence could entirely remodel him, for Harry had firm ideas of his own—there were many gaps between the two men. Indeed, their partnership, which is in force to-day, only related to fishing, and I think that in his heart Harry found Joe rather a dissatisfying substitute for his dead father. I know that after all these years I still think of Harry and Bob, and never of Harry and Joe; but then it is hardly fair to compare any man, even Harry himself, with Bob. His face alone made him supreme among them all.

There were fishermen of every sort at Aldeburgh. They varied in looks as much as they did in character. There were fat, jolly fishermen, who rolled and waddled like tubs in a swell; there were thin, gloomy fishermen, who moved as smoothly and gracefully as sloops before the wind; there were old, grey, bearded ones, hard and rough and knotty as the unscraped bottoms of their boats, who swore and glared savagely if you made a mess of a tack; there were young, sentimental ones, who sang meaningless ditties and trailed their fingers idly through the water and never bothered to see whether the jib was properly set. There were tall

fishermen with sallow skins and black, curly hair, who wore earrings and looked like Spaniards; there were short fishermen with red skins and fair, straight hair, who wore yachting caps and looked like butchers on holiday; there was a fisherman called Jumbo, because he looked so like a giraffe; there was another called Gofather, because any wearisome work that came his way he transferred straight to his father as a matter of course. But whatever their looks, their names, their behaviours, their characters, you could not know them for five minutes without guessing instinctively the common background of their lives. Sea, river and marsh were in their every gesture and utterance.

Among all this motley crowd on Slaughden Quay no two men were more oddly contrasted than Bob and Harry. A stranger would never have believed that they were father and son. Bob I have described as a tall, proud, noble person, the perfect counterpart of the man who scanned the Suffolk shores from the prow of the first invading Danish longship twelve hundred years ago. Harry was about five feet five inches in height and as thick and sturdy as a Jersey bull. He had a long, untidy beard, which was the delight of every small boy on the Quay. His eyes were large and brown, his face was round, broad and friendly, his mouth wide and always smiling, his skin the colour of a penny two months old. His hair was a thick mass of dark, matted curls, three or four of which dangled jauntily over his forehead from beneath the dirty cap that he always wore tilted towards the back of his head. He was not exactly good-looking, but his face was simple, humorous, lively, artless and engaging. You looked at Bob because his handsomeness com-

peled you; you looked at Harry because his pleasantness invited you.

Harry faccd peer and pauper alike imperturbably and with perfect assurance. He had a cool brain and a shrewd taste. If he didn't like you at the first meeting, he hardly bothercd to speak to you at the next; but if you met him on his own ground, treated him naturally and didn't come the haughty over him, then he welcomcd you with an impulsive friendliness and a naïve honesty. If by some miscalculation hc found himself caught in the toils of a rich, unpleasant client from whom he could not for the moment escape, he thought it only right to get his own back by adding large and fictitious items to his bill; the success of these mal-practices he would afterwards confide with great glee and satisfaction, probably telling you in the same breath that he had done the same to you before he had summcd you up correctly.

There were many peculiarities about Harry. He loved jam and strong tea, he loved telling stories, and he loved sniffing. That last idiosyncrasy sounds incrediblc, but I truly believe he sniffed for pleasure. Terrible sniffs they were, too, urgent and explosive, as if he were pulling back something that would keep trying to leap out of his nose. You got used to them after a while, and when you had listened to some of his most dramatic stories you realized what a useful addition they were to his technique, being far more effective in creating suspense than any verbal punctuation. Then there was his voice. It was a beautiful voice, one of the most beautiful I have ever heard—soft, smooth, husky, perfectly controlled and modulated. The coastal accent is altogether quieter and

more peaceful than that of the inland labourer, and Harry's was the quietest, just as Joe's was the most volcanic, of any fisherman I knew. His vowels were very broad and slurred, his pitch was very low; unless he got thoroughly roused or was talking into half a gale he never raised his tone at all, not even for effect or emphasis. I think his voice reflected his whole character.

A fisherman's life is a dangerous and, to us, a romantic one, and yet the fishermen themselves consider that their lives are very ordinary. Certainly there were no violent excitements in Harry's, although when I was with him almost every moment was an excitement of some kind. Only once did he ever leave Aldeburgh, and that was when he went for a holiday to a resort on the South Coast. How did he get on? Why, he got so bored that at the end of the third day he proposed to a girl, and before he came back the next week he married her. "So I din't dew so bad arter all," he used to say, "but Lor, I ain't a goin there na more, there ain't no sinse in them places."

Perhaps the outstanding event in his life was his "conversion", which occurred a long while ago, when he and Bob had taken on Joe as a temporary partner for the fishing season. In his youth he was, so he often told me, a violent sort of chap, given to the bottle and riotous living, much to the distress of Joe, who had been from the cradle upwards a man of strict and proper habits, a Plymouth Brother and a recognized preacher even in his early twenties. One morning when he and Joe were out on the high seas in their little spratting-boat, they ran into a wicked storm. Several times the boat nearly capsized, and when there came a sudden

burst of wind stronger than the others, Harry was flung into the sea. He choked, he struggled, he was cruelly beaten by the waves. And it was while he was struggling there, knowing he could not last much longer, with Joe's frantic shouts reaching him dimly through the blackness which swamped his mind and his soul, that he saw The Light. How he saw it or what it looked like, heaven only knows. He never described the vision. He saw it, and that was all. And when Joe at last succeeded in hauling him to safety, he was a changed man.

Thereafter The Light had a great and earnest influence on his life. No more wild nights in the "Black Horse", no more foolish squandering of that money which should be saved against his marriage. He at once joined the Plymouth Brethren, a sect which he had hitherto mocked and despised. Now he and Joe take it in turns to preach the sermon, and sharp at ten o'clock each Sunday morning Harry's family collects Joe's family, ready and waiting on their doorstep; slowly and thoughtfully the two men, each dressed in bright yellow boots, smart blue trousers and a well-preserved cloth cap, lead the way to the little chapel, fingering their prayer-books and conversing deeply. What they say when they get there must always be a mystery. One thing I have learned long ago is never to disturb Harry on a Sunday; the afternoon is spent in rest and thought, the evening in reading aloud from that book which he had scarcely even opened before the fateful morning when he so nearly met premature destruction in the sea. His family are sent to bed early, and Harry sits on by himself. He falls asleep. At midnight the alarm-

clock rouses him. Off come his Sunday clothes, on go his thigh-boots, his bulky jacket and his thick, knitted helmet. The morning flight is approaching, and his weekly conscience is satisfied.

Harry was our particular friend among the fishermen. It was with him that I made that first disastrous voyage in the *Mrs. Quickly*, of which I have already told; it was with him that we sailed and trawled and spratted all the year round; and, most important of all, it was he who first taught us how and where to shoot duck. Harry knew every yard of river and marsh between Butley Creek and Iken Point. The marshes on the landward side were privately owned, and he had no business to know anything about them at all; but, good gracious, the mere matter of ownership didn't worry him in the least; the more strictly the land was guarded, the more he considered it his duty to circumvent the forces of law and order. As a matter of fact, these forces were not very considerable, for there were only three keepers to patrol the whole ten miles of marsh and the woods behind it as well. But the keepers knew Harry's favourite haunts, and by and by it became so impossible to avoid them that Harry gave it up and decided that valour was the better course where discretion was not worth the trouble. He actually had the cheek to "feed" a certain pond in the marshes behind Cowton, and to maintain it throughout the year as his own private hunting-ground. This place lay a good two miles from Aldeburgh Ferry and he was the only man in the village who could find his way to it across the labyrinth of dykes, so that from one point of view it could certainly be regarded as his own property. He made use of it judiciously, allowing no

one to shoot it but his especial friends. He once invited Joe. Joe replied that poaching was a deadly sin; a violent quarrel arose; and after that Harry kept his escapades to himself.

If there was one person whom Harry really detested, it was a keeper; for him the keeper symbolized the oppression of liberty and equality and the whole spirit of the wildfowler's inheritance. Most of his animosity came to a head in the region of the Decoy creek, which was the best point for flighting in the whole river. This creek ran through the salttings to the river wall, where it diverged into two wide branches running along the foot of the wall and back into the river; thus the salttings here were formed as two islands, and these in turn were divided up into several small islands by creeks which wandered in and out of the main ones. The duck made a dead set upon this patch of salttings when they passed backwards and forwards between the Decoy and the river or the sea. You can imagine that in a good year we had some splendid flights at this place. The trouble was that to get the best out of the flights we sometimes had to go where the law of England had decreed that we should not be allowed.

From time unchronicled the shooting had been free to the public below high-water mark, which meant in the river, on the mud, in the creeks and, in this case, on the salttings as far as the two creeks which I have mentioned as running along the foot of the river wall. No farther; not one coveted inch. The river wall and all that lay beyond it, being above high-water mark, was the property of the owner of the marshes, who, if he had had his way, would have turned us out of

Suffolk altogether, for we were what Harry would have called "a fish-boon in his gullet", shooting all his best birds and making a burden of his keepers' lives. The law of the high-water mark every self-respecting wildfowler considered to be absurd, oppressive and insulting. Whenever it suited our purpose (which was about four times a week) we crossed the intervening creek and made use of one or other side of the wall. But Ted, Jess and Alfred knew their instructions; they must enforce our obedience to the law at all costs.

They certainly did their best. Night after night one or all of them came stumping across the marsh, grim, cursing, spurred to their unenviable duty by the thought that losing their jobs was one degree worse than losing their prestige. I must say I pitied them, for theirs was a wretched life. There was not a wildfowler in Aldeburgh who responded in the desired way to treatment fair or foul; the keepers had either to retire under the smirch of a bloodless defeat or else to face the prospect of a bloody and doubtful victory. I have seen battles at the Decoy creek which would have sent a promoter scurrying for contracts, and I have heard language which would have caused a drill-sergeant to block his ears. Many times Harry and his colleagues found themselves in the police court, charged with assault, battery, trespass, poaching and a whole volume of further misdemeanours. But even that method failed. You might as well try to fix a bow-tie round an eel's neck as pin a charge on to a fisherman.

One incident I remember above all others. Harry, my brother and I had sailed up the river one evening in our old converted beach-boat and, when the flight

began, had placed ourselves firmly at the foot of the wall. The flight was of the sort which we had dreamed about for years; it was unprecedented in its magnificence. I have never had such a flight before or since. And then, when we had been there for some twenty minutes, Jess appeared over the bank. Harry exploded. He roared at him to get back or get killed, explaining in a most ungrammatical manner that we were in the middle of the flight of a lifetime. Jess went. He went fifty yards down the bank and started a large bonfire. Before we could stop him he had fed it to the full with dry reeds and wood and wrack from the tide-mark. He then made a hasty disappearance across the marsh, and by the time we had put the fire out black night had descended upon the river and one of the choicest prospects of our eager lives was gone completely and for ever.

Sadly we made our way back to the boat. While we cooked our dinner and later, resting in our bunks, we talked only of one thing: the injustice of life, coupled with the devilry of the whole race of keepers. By and by we fell asleep and in a few hours, long before dawn, we were up and ready and once more ensconced at the foot of the wall. Such is the way of wildfowling that the flight was a poor one; we got a bird or two, but this was nothing to what we might have had the previous night and what we had, in fact, succeeded in getting before Jess Waters lit his hell-fire on the bank. We had just arranged ourselves in the punt and were negotiating the creek between the wall and the salt-ings, when, lo and behold, the infamous Jess pops up once more.

Harry at once leaps out of the punt. "Blank!

Blank! Blank!" cries he, and "Blank! Blank! Blank!" replies Jess, in like vein. The first printable sentence was: "Git yew orf hoom, yew barstid, dew I'll come up and knock yer blarsted thick hid orf." "Git yew back in yer punt, Harra, that ain't na use fer yew to start yer rough tricks, I got a little ould gun under me arm. On't yew come an stand on the bank agin, neither, dw I'll start a bloody gret fire ivery night o' the week, whoi Lor, yew beter git back to fishin, boy, thass more your tackle, yew on't dew na good a comin up around ere." Jess evidently feels that his new antidote has given him the upper hand at once.

To our astonishment Harry, instead of doubling his attack under the keeper's insults, crumples up without so much as an oath. "All roight, all roight, Jess boy," says he pacifically, "on't git s'naasty now, we on't dew na harm, we're now a goin orf hoom."

Jess, whose finger has been hovering on the trigger of his gun, is quite stunned. He goggles at us. "Thass all roight, chum, thass a good boy, then," he says.

"Well, we'll now git orf," says Harry. "Ere, arf a minute, though, Jess," he adds, "we got a little ould bard down in your marsh, that fill did as a stoon an that lay less'n a hundred yard orf, thass roight against the fust stile, my word, yew must ha parst that as cloos as my thumb, whatever less. Let me jest come an git that, chum, dew I on't give yew na more trubble, thass a good faller." What the devil is he talking about? We haven't got a bird down in the marsh at all, so far as I know.

Jess gives a roar of delight. "Whoi, yew bloody fule, yew," he shouts, "yew put a foot acrost this little

ould wall an I'll blow yer bloomin hid orf, yew're the damdarfstest faller I iver did know, Harra, an thass the trewth. Goodbye together," says he, " I'm orf now an I'll tek that little ould bard, thank yew I'm sure, that'll mek a nice little supper come Sunday, is that a teal or a grey duck then, Lor, I surely dew hoop thass an ould teal." And he stumps back across the marsh, chuckling his glee and shaking his curly head at this grand triumph. As for us, we gaze in dismay. We are inclined to endorse Jess's opinion of Harry.

Jess reaches the stile, about eighty yards away, and starts to climb over it. At the crucial moment Harry slowly raises his gun, takes careful aim, and discharges the scatter-barrel straight into the unmistakable target that confronts him. Jess falls headlong over the stile. He picks himself up, screams, curses, rubs the offended member and shakes it desperately to and fro. Pausing only for a shake of his fist and a volley of blasphemy, he hobblest away across the marsh, halting now and again to make sure that his anatomy is not completely disintegrated.

All three of us are weeping with laughter. Harry, stifling a final sob, cups his hands to his mouth and yells: "Niver moind about yer Sunday supper, Jess boy, yew git orf hoom an git yer missus to pick em out with er nail-sizzers!"

We saw no more of master Jess for many a long week; but never again did we have such a flight as he spoiled on that eventful evening.

Wildfowling was a fascinating game at all seasons, but I loved it most in summer and early autumn, when there were enough birds in the river to make it

worth our while to take our old boat up to the creek, spend the night on board and shoot both the morning and evening flights. How I long even now for those nights on the river—the lap and ripple of the water, the smooth mud shining like tinsel beneath the moon, the sharp, sudden crying of a startled water-bird, the droning of Harry's quiet voice as he embarked on some endless and entralling talk, the snore and whimper of his old black dog, shivering in his dreams on the dewy boards of the cockpit. And then the awakening in a darkness so chilly and austere that our spirits sank for the moment, because we were numb and sleepy and because the idea of dawn seemed remote and impossible; because we felt lost, too, lost and rather lonely, and could only find our bearings by the distant sweep of Orford light and the position of a star or two in the unfriendly skies.

In silence then we rowed up the creek and took our places against the bank. Waiting was so long and so tense in that chill before dawn that once when a huge white owl swept over the bank and brushed my head with his wing, I jumped as if I had been touched by a ghost, lost my balance and toppled back into the creek. But when a little teal swished by or the music of a mallard's wings sounded overhead, then the whole atmosphere changed at once; the chill and the silence lifted; the flight was on once more.

Anyone who has ever got out of bed at the best time of the day knows what an ordinary dawn looks like, a dawn over woods, fields or town; but the ardent wildfowler sees a dawn of unique and unbelievable loveliness. Those who have never been abroad in summer on a marsh or river during the

hour before sunrise have missed the most wonderful moments of a lifetime.

In the first darkness you can distinguish nothing, nothing save the pale band of the river and the jagged masses of the distant woods, like broken and blackened teeth in the jaw of an old giant. The silence is cool and hostile, enveloping your whole mind and body and reducing you to a small, shivering unit in the universal subjection of its influence. There is no life anywhere; not a bird calls, not a reed stirs, there is not even breath or colour in the earth itself.

By and by a long green strip, very luminous and hard, edges the deep blackness on the eastern horizon. It broadens; the stars give ground a little; a pale, transparent film spreads slowly up the sky, like a faint and phosphorescent gauze laid over a black cloth. For a while the silence lies more chilly than ever. And then from those dark, dented woods comes the sudden and lusty crow of an old cock pheasant, breaking upon the world like the ringing of an alarm-bell in a sleeping town. It is a signal. At once there bursts forth the most wonderful and tremendous clamour ever heard in Suffolk's quiet countryside. In front of you the triumphant crow of pheasants, the urgent caw of rooks, the gentle plaint of woodpigeons, the staccato jukking of partridges; behind you the scream of gulls, the nervous chatter of dunlin, the shrill pipe of redshank, the querulous wail of curlew and whimbrel, the throaty cackle of mallard and shelduck, the hoarse bark of ill-tempered old herons; all these and a score of other voices are mingled together in mighty concert, and the whole air throbs with the beauty and amazement of it. It is a noise fantastic, bewildering

and glorious. Perhaps for three or four minutes it is above you, around you, within you, sweeping you away on its mad cacophony; and then, as suddenly as it arose, it dies again, dies on a single note, like a crescendo broken off at the fall of the conductor's baton. And at once the very silence stuns you.

But the silence does not last for long. The birds of marsh and field and wood and river are on the move once more, and the veil is quickly lifting on another day. That green film across the sky, forgotten during the chorus of the birds, is growing stronger and stronger; it is surprising with what speed the light comes, and even more surprising how long is the interval between the coming of the light and the appearance of the sun himself. Now the marsh is piecing itself together; now you can distinguish landmarks, a stile, a derelict farm, a field of corn stooked on the previous day; now you can pick out the foremost trees from what a short while ago was nothing but a black, solid ridge of rock. And now, too, there moves before you the strangest phenomenon in all this miracle of dawn—the mist.

It seems to come suddenly out of the wood two miles away, a white, woolly phalanx mustering at the foot of the hill. For a moment it hangs uncertainly, shifting, wavering, and then it rolls steadily forward, creeping breast-high over the dull plain of the marsh, like a cloud of dust before a line of horsemen. But as it nears you it is no longer a solid cloud; it is more like the vapour from a thousand small cauldrons in the earth, fragile and thin, slight and diaphanous, wreathing and curling into curious, restless shapes. The fingers of it stretch out to the bank, almost to your feet, clutching gently and helplessly at the heads of the reeds. And

thus the mist stays, spread over the marsh, never rising, never settling, and the writhing strands grow fainter and thinner until at last they dissolve altogether.

All this while the light increases. The marsh is quite clear, though the colours of it are dull and lifeless. From every reed-head hangs a gossamer, sometimes three or four on a single stem, all of different shapes and sizes, all perfect and complete, all sparkling and swaying together. They were there in the darkness, and they will be there until the sun leaps up over the wood. Then for a moment they will glint and flash like opals turned under a strong light; at the climax of that moment they will wither and disappear, and with them will go the last vestige of night and of dawn. Once the sun is up there will be nothing further to keep you on the bank. The flight will be over. You will look all round the sky and see that not a duck is moving anywhere, and then you will know that it is time for you to make your way down the creek again.

Flighting in winter is a very different affair. Most of the native birds have either been shot or have moved off elsewhere, and none but the real enthusiast faces the hardships of a morning flight. Unless a really cold spell sets in, the only foreign duck to arrive in any number are the widgeon, and they are so difficult to come to terms with that the majority of them are left to the wiles of the punt-gunner. My brother and I had a punt-gun, an old four-bore, and the noise we made with it was out of all proportion to the results. Punt-gunning is an art by itself, a distinct and separate form of sport, which requires the patience and study of a lifetime. We had a duck-punt, too, a double one, nineteen feet long, a lovely boat to row. She is still

on her same moorings in the creek by the jetty, and we still use her whenever we can.

English winters are tame nowadays. The last cold spell of any real violence struck the East Coast in the late winter of 1929. Then the Alde and its marshes were literally flooded with duck and geese, some of which were almost unknown on the English coast. My brother and I, Harry and the old dog, lived on the boat for a fortnight on end, never coming ashore except for supplies, cartridges and fuel. The only two drawbacks were these: the appalling difficulty of trying to keep warm and the trouble of negotiating the huge packs of ice that came bumping down the river. The duck we saw and the duck we shot were beyond the maddest dreams even of Harry, and if we live to greet the next century we shall never forget that amazing fortnight. I can assure you that if weather comparable to that were to reach England again at this very moment, then this book would go back into my desk and stay there until it was over.

I remember that during that fortnight the hero of the party was Harry's dog, Widge (short for widgeon), a fellow of doubtful parentage, who could claim curly-coated retriever as his dominant strain. We believe he found at least forty-five per cent of our birds for us. Time and again all three of us were left gasping at his courage and perseverance, for alone and unasked he faced that cruel river, packed with ice and cold enough, as Harry said, to "freeze the furs off a Eskimo." He was a grand swimmer, but how he escaped drowning or immediate death from exposure and sheer exhaustion was a miracle. The first time he made for the water's edge Harry roared to him to come back.

Widge did what he had never done before: he disobeyed flatly. He knew he could do it, and nothing short of a charge of shot would stop him. Thereafter he acted on his own initiative; he leaped off the boat, and all he asked was to be helped on board and allowed the warmth of the cabin when he returned; he spent half the day in the marshes and the frozen dykes, and all he needed of us was some assistance in carrying the heap of birds which he collected at a chosen point. Poor old Widge, that fortnight killed him; and yet had we restrained him forcibly he would never have forgiven us, and his relationship with Harry would never have been quite the same again. When at length we came back to the Quay for good we saw at once that the strain had been too much even for his great strength; he moved stiffly, he turned his head slowly, his yellow eyes were dulled with an unnatural listlessness. In three weeks his muzzle was flecked with grey. In another month his limbs were so rigid that he had to goad himself into coming to the Quay at all—as a rule he was there soon after dawn, waiting to carry out Harry's every move and wish almost before it was made. By and by he stayed at home all day, and he said so plainly "It's all up now," that none of us, least of all Harry, could bear to meet his eye. In less than a year he was dead.

I have seen the best retrievers in England at work in field and covert. In such company and in such environment Widge would have been lost. But if you had set the finest of those splendid dogs against him on the banks of the Alde, they would have been like a pack of pekingeses trying to outclass a terrier in a rat hunt. In his own peculiar branch of work, the

most difficult of all, Widge was supreme. For keenness, courage, intelligence and resource I have never seen a dog that could have stood up to him for a moment. You must simply take my word for it, for I have not the space here to support my contentions; but everyone who knew him (and he was the sort of dog who is remembered for generations after his death) will do it for me. Widge worked by instinct; he needed no guidance, he scorned all commands. He would sit crouched and tense at Harry's side, his eyes moving round and round the horizon, his nostrils twitching, every nerve keyed up for the flight to begin. Long before we could see it we knew by the sudden stiffening of his whole body that a bird was coming. A duck when hard hit can carry on for a mile or more; of course, to a human being, it is lost in the semi-darkness after less than a hundred yards. Harry, straining his eyes, would curse at the hopelessness of trying to follow it. But not so Widge. As the duck came overhead he rose slowly to his feet; he kept his eyes fixed upon it, he saw that it was hit, he turned round to watch it just as Harry did. And there he stood, still and steady as a pointer, staring, staring, staring over the marsh, long after the bird had passed beyond his master's sight. Suddenly he relaxed, and in an instant he was gone, with one clear bound from the top of the wall across the dyke at the bottom. Perhaps it was half an hour before he came back; and when he did come, that duck was in his mouth. How could he possibly know the exact instant when the bird touched the ground, half a mile or even a mile away? Harry often suggested that perhaps Widge could tell, as he could himself, precisely when

the bird should come down by the way it was hit and the strength of its flight when it passed from sight. If the bird crossed the river, it didn't matter; Widge would retrieve it just the same.

Harry and Widge had one favourite and frequent trick in which they were never caught out. At the end of the flight some fellow from another party comes up and says: "I've got a bird down over in the marshes, Harry. Any use sending your dog for it?" "Where dew that lie, then?" asks Harry. "Oh ah, thass ower that way, eh? No, that ain't na use, chum, the little ould dawg he's bin ower there ariddy, whoi, that must ha swam orf up a crick or suthen, dew he'd surely ha found that, he on't miss much, this ere dawg on't." We all troop off in line along the bank, and Harry takes good care to bring up the rear. "Hi lawst, then, goo' boy!" he whispers suddenly, with a wave of his hand, and Widge slips off into the darkness. Ten minutes later he is back again, trotting at Harry's heels with the duck in his mouth. Long before we say good-night to the man who lost it, that bird is buried deep in one of Harry's huge pockets.

To anyone who didn't know them, the relationship between Widge and Harry must have seemed rough and unsympathetic. In daily life they appeared to take not the slightest notice of each other. If ever Widge got in Harry's way or fell out of the boat or refused to eat his dinner, Harry dismissed him curtly with: "Git along then, Widge, bloody ould fule!" And even after a display of incredible brilliance the dog received not a pat on the back and not a word of praise; it was not his nature to expect it. Yet one never went anywhere without the other, and when Widge died,

Harry seemed listless for a while, and his voice fell to an even quieter pitch. And now Widge is honoured by a thousand thrilling stories; in legend he has even superseded the little cross-bred spaniel that Harry used to take to the flight in a bag slung across his back.

I cannot finish off this chapter without a final word about the Suffolk marshes, for it is around them that all this has really been written. I would rather be on a Suffolk marsh than anywhere else in England or in the whole world. The marsh fascinates me in a way that no other country does, and that is probably why I find it so hard to describe. I could describe my wife to you by saying that she has blue eyes, fair hair and a delightful complexion; but would that tell you anything about her at all? In the same way I could describe the Suffolk marsh by saying that the willows are silvery green, the dykes slimy with duck-weed, the grass dark green and the reeds brown; but would you be any the wiser for it? No, and if you have never seen one, I do not know how to portray the Suffolk marsh to you so that you may really understand it and know the nature of it. Above my head there hangs a picture, a water-colour of the marshes of the Blyth at Wenhampton. In the foreground is a straggling bed of brown reeds growing out of and around a dyke; in the middle stand two tall elms and an aspen, and beneath their cool branches two Suffolk Punches and half a dozen cows are grazing; you can see from the shine on the grass and the shadows thrown by the trees that the sun must be very hot, although the sky is pale and wisped with fine clouds; in the background are a thick line of willows, a little



A MARCH NEAR THE COAST

The Suffolk marsh fascinates me, it has a character and an atmosphere, a mystery and a rarity that cannot be transcribed

Major Basil Jarvis



farm and a couple of well-kept cottages. It is a true and perfect picture of an inland marsh in Suffolk; and yet I cannot reproduce it here, for in black-and-white all its charm and colour would be lost. I carry in my head many such true and perfect pictures of marshes, both inland and by the sea; and yet I cannot reproduce them here, for I feel that in print all their charm and colour would be lost in the same way.

The marsh has a character and an atmosphere, a mystery and a rarity that cannot be transcribed. Certainly a great deal of its outward charm comes from contrast with its setting, a contrast made all the more obvious because the surroundings are nearly always on a higher level than the marsh itself, whether they be corn or woods or heath. But it is the nature of the marsh that entrals you, its loneliness, its wilderness, its freedom, its ever-changing patterns and colours, its own peculiar flowers and birds and animals.

Many people have told me that marshes are uninspiring and monotonous. I wish I could show them a few that I know. I like all marshes, but it has always seemed to me that a Suffolk marsh has more variety and subtlety than any other; if you think that this is my fancy or enthusiasm, then the best thing you can do is to go and find out for yourself.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE FAME OF SUFFOLK

#### i. THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH (1727-1788)

TWO of the world's greatest artists were born within fourteen miles of each other and on the same river. Rolling in from the sea, the Stour is wide and calm; above Manningtree it comes to a bridge, and suddenly it is no longer an illimitable lake, but a simple, winding stream. It is confined by the meadows, dimmed by the woods; and among those woods straggles the village of East Bergholt, the home of John Constable. Past mills and locks and villages flows the Stour, narrowing with every mile, and from a distance you can trace it only by the poplars and willows that fringe its twisted course. Then the woods contract, the long, low slopes draw back, the meadows curve away in a glorious sweep as if releasing at once all their imprisoned majesty; the Stour, thin and small and choked with green, swinging reeds, creeps across the plain like a tiny, aimless thread. A town spreads about it, hiding it, shutting it in once more; and that is Sudbury, Thomas Gainsborough's birthplace.

The same county, the same river—and there the resemblance ends. In all else the men were two perfect opposites. Each possessed supreme talent, each set out to drive the same furrow through the world; but in

the method and success of their driving they had not a single point in common.

One difference between them is still curiously shown in the honours accorded to them in the places of their birth. In Bergholt there is hardly a trace of Constable; the remains of his father's little estate have been turned into a tea-garden, and Flatford Mill, hidden in the valley, has been presented to the nation. But the great man's origin is so little advertised that an untutored visitor might well spend a week in the village without ever becoming aware of it. In Sudbury, however, the name of Gainsborough is used to good effect. At every entrance to the town he flares up at you from large blue notice-boards; there are his street, his cinema, his café, his shop, his school, his statue, his house—the last a fine, big place, much altered, refaced and turned into an hotel. Sudbury needs no advertisement; it is a pleasant old town, with three grand churches and nearly forty pubs; its prosperity has, however, diminished considerably, and it may well be excused for subsisting upon Gainsborough's reputation as much as upon its own graces. The connexions between the man and the town are not very substantial. Apart from the house, there is a large Congregational chapel in Friars' Street in which are a tablet to two of Gainsborough's relatives and, I suspect, a vault containing the remains of some of his family. Then there is another chapel—the whole family were dissenters—built by one of his sisters after a violent quarrel with her minister. For many years it was called "Spite Chapel", and it is still used to-day. Beyond these thin links there is nothing at all from which the would-be pilgrim can make a chain. Never-

theless, Gainsborough is Sudbury's hero, the life, meat and spirit of the town.

And so there is much pomp and honour for the one, while hardly a note is sounded in his native village for the other. And this, to say the least of it, is most unjust, for Gainsborough was in no way the greater man, the greater artist, or (according to judgment long delayed) the greater influence. But it has always been thus. Gainsborough, almost from the beginning of his career, was passing rich; Constable, until more than half his long battle was over, had to worry over every penny. Gainsborough's path was soon an easy one; he was praised, exalted, worshipped; his reputation was equalled by that of Reynolds alone. The only adoration that Constable knew came from his wife, his children and a handful of friends; as a painter he was belittled, misundcrstood, maltreated and ridiculed; his reputation would have been refused by a dustman. Constable was a plodder; he gritted his teeth, stuck to his landscape; and in the eyes of the contemporary world he never succeeded. Gainsborough, after a few years, had no need to plod; he turned from landscape to portraiture; he was an immediate and amazing success. And yet he spent much of his life brooding over the landscapes that he longed to paint, but never painted because he could not sell them. A strange twist of irony.

"The landscape of Gainsborough is soothing, tender and affecting. The stillness of noon, the depths of twilight, and the dews and pearls of the morning, are all to be found on the canvases of this most benevolent and kind-hearted man. On looking at them, we find tears in our eyes, and know not what brings

them. The lonely haunts of the solitary shepherd—the return of the rustic with his bill and bundle of wood—the darksome lane or dell—the sweet little cottage girl at the spring with her pitcher—were the things he delighted to paint, and which he painted with exquisite refinement, yet not a refinement beyond nature.” Thus did John Constable, himself the most generous, benevolent and kind-hearted of men, speak of Thomas Gainsborough. Yet Gainsborough could not sell his landscapes. And neither could poor Constable sell his.

Gainsborough is not only the most famous man of Suffolk, but also a considerable contribution to the fame of England; how comes it, then, that the actual facts of his life are lamentably obscure? So little is known of him that there is even some doubt as to whether or not he was really born in the house I have mentioned. For myself, I do not believe him when he says: “Old pimply-nosed Rembrandt and myself were both born in a mill.” There is no record of his father ever having owned a mill. John Gainsborough was a prosperous woollen manufacturer, well able at first to provide for his nine children. Later on, when the wool trade was at its last grasp, his business declined so miserably that he was reduced to the position of town postmaster. But by that time Thomas himself had scaled half the mountain of success; and this was lucky for them all, for someone had to keep the eldest brother, “Scheming Jack”, a hare-brained fellow who spent his life “inventing” such crazy things as copper wings to enable mankind to fly, a cradle which rocked itself and a cuckoo which would sing all the year round.

Gainsborough once declared that "there was not a picturesque clump of trees, nor even a single tree of any beauty, no, nor hedgerow, stem or post" in the neighbourhood of Sudbury that he did not love from his earliest years. Yet, unlike Constable, who devoted his life, his thoughts and his ambitions to a dozen miles of valley, returning to the same places and the same people year after year until the time of his death, Gainsborough very soon deserted Suffolk altogether. The fault was not his. Engulfed by the tumultuous tide of fortune, he had no other choice. And it may well be that he missed his trees and hedge-rows more deeply than anyone has ever realized.

In 1745 he returned to Sudbury from his first studies in London, where he had been for three years. At the age of nineteen he married the rich and beautiful Margaret Burr, said to be an illegitimate daughter of the Duke of Bedford. Young as he was, he painted at this time some of his most exquisite portraits and landscapes. He finished the 'Wood Scene—Village of Cornard'—a view now quite impossible to identify—which he had begun years before, while still at school. He painted his wife and children, Mr. and Mrs. Brown on the edge of a sandpit in the distant village of Tunstall, and—to my mind the loveliest of all his pictures—the rubicund Mr. and Mrs. Andrews of "Auberries", just outside his own town, setting them against the whole broad sweep of the Stour valley. That view I found some years ago, and quite by accident, while I was walking from London to my village near the Suffolk coast. All the afternoon I had trudged doggedly down a long road through the high, flat Essex country, while the bitter November wind

ripped through my body and brought tears of cold to my eyes, and the dismal skies leaned down to fold themselves oppressively about my mind. I had never been to Sudbury before. Longing for it, I put a mental tick to every mile upon the map. And on the map a name, obviously denoting a large park, caught my eye—"Auberries". A dim chord sounded in my memory. I fumbled after it, sighed, dismissed it, and trudged along. I came to large iron gates; the gates, undoubtedly, of "Auberries". Again that chord stirred teasingly, again I fumbled, and again I let it go. In another moment I was on the crest of the long, steep hill that drops down into Sudbury. Beneath me lay the compact little town, and not the town alone, but, away to the left, a great green plain of marsh and water-meadow, spreading out to soft and uneven slopes in the clear distance. I leaned upon a gateway and stared dumbly over and beyond the town. And as I stared the dust seemed suddenly to be shaken from the key-strings of my mind. A man and a woman, handsome, red-cheeked, a gun, a dog, a scat beneath an oak tree, stooked corn upon a rolling slope, a broad valley backed by bright, distant uplands receding into shadow—the whole view stretched before me, the exact and perfect view that had lain buried in some deep corner of my mind for many years. A quick warmth spread through me, the pain and the smarting cleared from my eyes. I leaned upon my gateway until the thin autumnal mist, that mist which smells of old leaves and smoke, came swinging down from the ridges and drifted steamily across the marsh.

In 1752 Gainsborough, having laid in Sudbury the foundations of his art, moved to Ipswich to lay the

foundations of his fortune. There he remained for more than five years, turning gradually towards the portraiture which was his full and splendid talent, yet always weaving into it the beloved and immortal landscape of his youth. Such an influence did he leave in and around Ipswich that Constable, half a century later, fancied he could see him "in every hedge and hollow tree." Gainsborough laid his foundations firmly. He was immensely popular, and he made the best friends of his lifetime. One was Joshua Kirby, who, by introducing him to the King some twenty years later, was really responsible for Gainsborough's conversation piece of the royal family. Another was Philip Thicknesse, Governor of Landguard Fort, who at once took Gainsborough under his patronage, thrust him into the highest places and remained his dearest companion until a serious quarrel parted them for ever. The quarrel was no fault of Gainsborough's. Thicknesse fell out with all and sundry. He sank so low in character that he eventually became something akin to a professional blackmailer. Years later he even tried to victimize Gainsborough's widow, threatening to attack not only her own reputation but that of his dead friend as well.

Thicknesse, a man of varied talents and considerable means, wintered at Bath, the centre of wealth, health, fashion and culture. And to Bath, in 1759, he lured Gainsborough, with many a high promise. Never again, so far as is known, did the artist so much as set eyes on the quiet, lonely fields and woods of Suffolk, which had cradled his genius almost to the time of its maturity. Bath and London claimed him; he leaped at once to fame and triumph; Clive, Burke, Pitt,

Beaumont, Chesterfield, Sheridan, Garrick, Sarah Siddons, Perdita Robinson, dukes, duchesses, princes, kings—he knew them and he painted them all; he became the favourite painter of the court; he rose from height to height until he stood at last upon the highest pinnacle within an artist's reach.

Of his art I propose to say nothing. For two hundred years it has been extolled and worshipped, and so it will be as long as there are men upon the earth with eyes for beauty and with minds for praise. My own tributes are deep and passionate, and they shall remain unspoken. Neither do I wish to insult so perfect and sublime an artist by any puny analysis of his creations.

But what of Gainsborough the man? I can give you no sure insight into his character, because the evidence is weak and always contradictory. A single sentence which he uttered on his death-bed should provide the strongest clue of all; yet so uncertain are the details of his life that even this I cannot follow up as I should wish. "They must take me altogether," said he, "liberal, thoughtless, dissipated." If by liberal he meant generous, then he was right indeed, for he gave away his pictures and his money wholeheartedly and with an impulsive lack of discrimination.

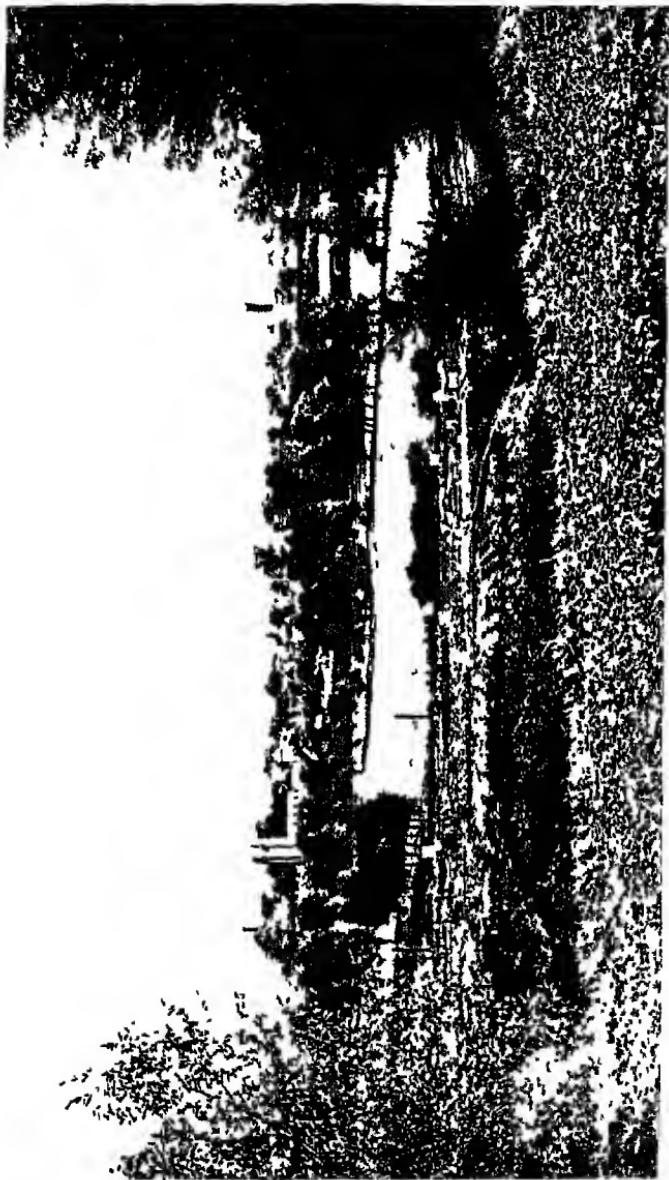
As to his thoughtlessness, I think he did himself an injustice. Careless he may have been, and mettlesome and haughty; but he was essentially tender and simple, and sincere to those he loved. The swiftness of his miraculous successes spoiled him not at all. Rather was it the other way about; the stronger his position became, the less did he seek to profit by it. He chose his friends for their qualities and not for their greatness; when Fame walked into his studio, although he

portrayed her superbly, he eyed her dispassionately. The Duchess of Devonshire, Sarah Siddons, Perdita Robinson—there was a power and a beauty not to be ravished and exploited, but to be expressed and translated by the deepest, sincerest virtues of which his genius was capable. And I think that to the end of his days he would have looked with more enthusiasm and delight upon “the sweet little cottage girl with her pitcher” than upon any of these great ones.

Dissipated? I don't believe it. Not dissipated as were Byron, Morland, Rembrandt and a hundred others. Bohemian, passionate, given to occasional outbursts of temperament—but dissipated, no. The man who spends his life in a hopeless chase after beauty, or who, finding it, does not know that he holds it—he it is who plunges into dissipation through sheer despair; but I think that Gainsborough found beauty, that he knew the elusive formula by which it is grasped and secured, and that he had, therefore, no need for spiritual escape. Certainly he sought beauty in more ways than one. He sought it in music, and played exquisitely on four different instruments. He even sought it in handwriting, and would pin fine specimens upon his canvas to encourage him while he worked.

He wanted no honour and ceremony. He was content with small things, with the simplicity of his own home and the visits of his old friends. He loved his daughters, although they were eccentric and caused him much grief. He loved his wife; after a quarrel, the two would send their dogs to each other with messages of forgiveness in their mouths.

He was imperious, capricious, sensitive, proud. He quarrelled easily, and just as easily he set his quarrels



SUDBURY FROM BELLINGDON HILL

Thomas Gainsborough's birthplace is a pleasant old town, with three grand churches and nearly forty pubs  
C. de Paula



straight. There was but one man in the world of whom he had right or reason to be jealous, and that was Reynolds. Reynolds bought his pictures, described him in public as "the first landscape painter in Europe;" yet Gainsborough, though he praised Reynolds's painting, treated him shamefully, ignored him, and made no attempt to hide his feelings, whatever may have been the cause of them. This abuse of a great and kind man was the one serious flaw in his life; and then, with that generosity of spirit which had always been his essential charm, he redeemed it at the last moment.

He lay dying. He wrote to Reynolds to express, in Reynolds's words: "His acknowledgments for the good opinion I entertained of his abilities, and the manner in which (he had been informed) I had always spoke of him; and desired he might see me once more before he died. . . ."

Reynolds went to his rival's death-bed. Gainsborough murmured that "his regret at leaving life was principally the regret of leaving his art; and more especially as he now began to see what his deficiencies were, which he flattered himself in his last works were in some measure supplied." And Reynolds ended his account with these simple and pathetic words: "If any little jealousies had subsisted between us, they were forgotten in those moments of sincerity, and the dying man whispered to me, 'We are all going to Heaven, and Van Dyke is of the party.' "

Reynolds was a pall-bearer at the funeral. The next of his famous lectures he devoted entirely to praise of the genius of Gainsborough.

## 2. GEORGE CRABBE (1754-1832)

Crabbe had none of the flash and fire of Gainsborough, none of the grand genius of Constable. And yet, because he devoted his life to the fashioning of a true and perfect picture of Suffolk, he perhaps deserves more of my praise than either of the others.

Constable, too, devoted his life to Suffolk. But—although it sounds absurd to say so—his picture stopped short of Crabbe's. Constable drew his inspiration from the landscape; no doubt he loved the people, too, but they found no place in his work. It was the beauty of Suffolk that he set himself to give to the world—the beauty of fields, trees, rivers and valleys. Often he saw it as a frowning, brooding beauty, yet always he infused it with that freshness and delight which, in his eyes, shone upon every leaf and every cloud. Landscape was his life and joy, and landscape he perfected.

Crabbe saw beyond the landscape. He saw beyond the beauty. He dug right down into the earth and peered and rummaged until he had uncovered the deepest root and dragged the most putrid weed to the surface. He did not rest till he had wrung the secrets from a man's heart and shaped them to his own use in all their grim reality. Not that he revelled in gloom. He welcomed happiness as eagerly as any man. But he was a realist; he went for the truth; he seized upon country and cottage and character and stripped them remorselessly of all their gloss and varnish. He

was a man of insight, sympathy and understanding; poverty and tragedy grieved him, and he was determined that they should grieve the world as well.

Crabbe gave us the whole of Suffolk, from the moaning waves upon the desolate shore to the lazy trickling of the inland river, from the bullying landlord to the meddlesome widow, from the horrors of the Poor House to the stately comfort of the manor. Nothing escaped him; in his hands the most unimportant detail became dramatic and significant, and it was by collecting and expanding the small points, which by themselves would have made no impression at all, that he gained his fullest effects.

Although he could create a fine and vivid landscape when it suited his purpose, his real strength lay not in depicting the things of the eye, but those of the mind; not in describing the languid, superficial scene, but the life that swarmed beneath it. The easiest and most obvious descriptions often puzzled and defeated him. He had not the technique to adapt himself to them and they were not what he wanted. He sought the root rather than the flower itself, the heart rather than the smile. His power was greatest when he moulded a character, when he came to his story from within, unfolding bit by bit the simplicity, the sadness, the squalor, for those were the things which touched him most deeply and which were to him the basis of truth and sincerity.

False sentiment he abhorred. He knew too much of the deeper and more depressing side of life ever to be deceived by it. He was born among people whose lives were a long, dreary struggle, in the back street of a village surrounded by heaths and marshes, battered

eternally by the sea. That village was Aldeburgh, then clinging desperately to its last vestige of importance as a fishery and a port.

Between the roadway and the walls, offence  
Invades all eyes and strikes on every sense:  
There lie obscene at every open door  
Heaps from the hearth and sweepings from the floor,  
And day by day the mingled masses grow  
As sinks are disembogued and kennels flow.  
There hungry dogs from hungry children steal,  
There pigs and chickens quarrel for a meal:  
There dropsied infants wail without redress  
And all is want and woe and wretchedness.

Such were the scenes to which Crabbe first opened his eyes.

His father, who had been parish clerk, schoolmaster and warehouse-keeper in various parts of the county, eventually settled at Aldeburgh—his native village—and became saltmaster, or collector of salt duties. He was an energetic, intelligent man, fond of astronomy and poetry; in this way he undoubtedly had a considerable influence on the character of George, the eldest of his six children. But he had too many failings; he was temperamental, violent, over-fond of the bottle, and the pleasant side of his character became more and more submerged as he grew older. Altogether the family life was a wretched one, and to George, timid and sensitive, it must have been unbearable. But by its very unhappiness the life in and around Aldeburgh made a deep impression on his mind, an impression which he later developed to the full. He was driven, too, to that most coveted of virtues—self-sufficiency. He taught himself to read. He found comfort in nature,

particularly in botany, and he took to wandering alone in the wild, waste country that hemmed in the village on every side.

I loved to walk where none had walked before,  
About the rocks that ran along the shore;  
Or far beyond the sight of men to stray,  
And take my pleasure when I lost my way:  
For then 'twas mine to trace the hilly heath,  
And all the mossy moor that lies beneath.  
Here had I favourite stations, where I stood  
And heard the murmurs of the ocean-flood,  
With not a sound beside, except when flew  
Aloft the lapwing, or the grey curlew.

His father decided that this solitary, fanciful boy was to become a surgeon, and so, after short attendance at two schools in Bungay and Stowmarket, both of which he disliked extremely, young George was packed off to be apprentice to a so-called doctor at the little village of Wickham Brook near Bury. This turned out to be even worse than the schools. The doctor was really a farmer; George was put to work in the fields and slept in the same bed as the ploughboy. After three miserable years he was transferred to a surgeon at Woodbridge, and by this move the whole course of his life was decided. He joined a club, began to write poetry, met for the first time in his life young men with whom he could converse intelligently, and, perhaps the most important influence of all, was introduced to his faithful Sarah Elmy.

Sarah it was who nursed and encouraged his earliest efforts, and who, by her devotion alone, supported him through twelve years of bitterness and hardship that would have crushed a less courageous man. She

divided her time between her home at Beccles and the house of a rich uncle at Parham, a large, lonely, moated farm called Duckling Hall, standing on Silverlace Green just above the village, where the New Hall stands to-day. Crabbe wrote some grand descriptions of the life at Uncle Tovell's farm, and in particular of the gigantic meals which used to be eaten in the kitchen by labourers, tinkers, rat-catchers and anybody else who happened to drop in; these orgies, he said, so oppressed and disgusted his delicate Sarah that

She could not breathe; but with a heavy sigh,  
Rein'd the fair neck and shut th' offended eye.

His friendship with Sarah led him all over east Suffolk. In "The Lover's Journey" he described minutely how he rode up the coast from Aldeburgh to visit her at Beccles; apart from the development of Thorpeness, hardly a yard of the route has altered since his expedition one hundred and fifty years ago.

At Woodbridge he wrote and published his first long poem, "Inebriety". He then returned to Aldeburgh, and found his home in a most miserable state. His father had succumbed entirely to drink and violence; his mother was weak and ill; there was no money. George had perforce to earn his living on Slaughden Quay as a labourer about the warehouse. Needless to say, he loathed every moment of the work. He escaped to London to finish his apprenticeship, exhausted his funds, came back to Aldeburgh and set up as a doctor on his own account. He was shy, clumsy, dreamy. The villagers, seeing him come home day after day with his hands and pockets full of weeds from the marsh dykes, put him down as a dangerous quack.

His medical career was a hopeless failure; and in 1780 he put an end to it himself. He had a final quarrel with his father, borrowed some money to pay his bills, and set sail in a sloop from Slaughden Quay for London, his heart brimming with a sturdy resolve to enrich the world by his poetry. With him he took three pounds, a box of clothes and a small case of surgical instruments.

In London he experienced the greatest trials of his life. He wrote and rewrote, but his poems, with one exception, were refused by every publisher he visited. And no sooner had the exception been published than the firm went bankrupt, taking Crabbe's meagre royalties with it. He sent letters to the great men of the time: to Lord North, the Prime Minister, to Lord Shelburne, to Lord Thurlow, the Lord Chancellor. Thurlow snubbed him; the others answered not at all.

Crabbe was a brave man, but he must at times have come very near to breaking-point. Without his Sarah he would surely have given up all hope, and perhaps even life itself. Every week he wrote to her in Suffolk, and I think that these two extracts from his letters show the whole man both in his strength and sensibility: "I did not, nor could, conceive that, with a very uncertain prospect before me, a very bleak one behind, and a *very* poor one around me, I should be so happy a fellow. I don't think there's a man in London worth but  $4\frac{1}{2}d.$ —for I've this moment sent seven farthings for a pint of porter—who is so resigned to his poverty." How many men could have written such glad words at such a sorry time? And then, just two days later, his failure overwhelmed him: "I am dull and heavy and can no more go on with my work.

The head and heart are like children, who, being praised for their good behaviour, will overact themselves; and so it is with me. Oh! Sally, how I want you."

It was when he was on the verge of starvation, having pawned all he possessed, except his old, threadbare suit, that he wrote as a last resort to Edmund Burke, and proceeded to pass the night in a feverish pacing of Westminster Bridge. Burke saw him, liked him, lent him money, arranged for the publication of his poem "*The Library*" and, later, enabled him to be ordained. In a few years George Crabbe was a happy, famous and successful man. By sheer determination he had fought his way up from a labourer on the quay at Aldeburgh to one of the highest positions in the literature of his time, and to the friendship of such men as Johnson, Reynolds, Burke, Fox and Scott.

To me those early days are the most interesting part of his life. Fame meant nothing to him; all he desired was to be allowed to return to Suffolk and settle down with his beloved Sarah. And this was precisely what he did, so that his story became that of an ordinary country parson, kind, shy and unassuming, who spent his days in bowling through the lanes in a one-horse chaise and in picking flowers in the hedgerows, and his nights in reading to his family ("there was a nameless something about his intonation, which could sometimes make even a ludicrous stanza affecting," said his son) and in writing about the people among whom he lived. His son has described Crabbe's simple life with far more intimacy than ever I could; as for his success as a parson, a single quotation shows the

homely informality for which his parishioners must have loved him:

" 'I must have some money, gentlemen,' he would say, in stepping from the pulpit. This was his notice of tithe-day. Once or twice, finding it grow dark, he abruptly shut his sermon, saying: 'Upon my word, I cannot see; I must give you the rest when we meet again.' Or he would walk into a pew near a window, and stand on the seat and finish his sermon, with the most admirable indifference to the remarks of his congregation."

Crabbe went first of all as curate to Aldeburgh. But Aldeburgh would have none of him; the people—

A wild amphibious race  
With sullen woe displayed in every face,  
Who far from civil arts and social fly  
And scowl at strangers with suspicious eye

—had not forgotten the eccentric herbalist, nor the debaucheries of his father; moreover, Crabbe was suspected of sympathy with Dissent.

And so he parted company with Aldeburgh, and took his revenge upon it in "The Village", which he published in 1783. He left Suffolk for ten years, most of which he spent—entirely through the assistance of Burke—as chaplain to the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle. In 1792 old Uncle Tovell, of Duckling Hall at Parham, died, and Crabbe, as his executor, returned at once to his native county. He soon took on the curacies of Great Glemham and Sweffling, two small, secluded villages within a few miles of my own. For five years he lived at Great Glemham Hall, and when this house was sold, he moved to a smaller one at

Rendham, just beyond Sweffling and on the opposite side of the Alde valley. I have identified the sites of both these houses. Glemham Hall was burnt down some hundred years ago and rebuilt on the other side of the park, above the lake; the only remnants of the old buildings are the huge, round, brick dovecote, capable of holding five hundred birds, and the stables, now converted into cottages. The house itself stood about fifty yards to the west of these; when an old beech tree was rooted up two years ago, some of the original foundations were discovered.

The house at Rendham has been greatly altered, but the gardens and farm buildings are much as they must have been in Crabbe's day. It lies low down in the valley, very quiet, deserted and sheltered, looking across the little river and the flat, green meadows towards the church. It was in this house that Crabbe wrote "*The Borough*" (founded on Aldeburgh) and "*The Parish Register*" (based upon Aldeburgh, Glemham and Sweffling). He also wrote three novels, but, when his family condemned them, he cheerfully consigned them to a large bonfire in the garden. He had published nothing since "*The Village*" in 1783; but before "*The Register*" appeared in 1807, he had to leave Suffolk and return to his living near Belvoir, which he had neglected for thirteen years.

He never lived in Suffolk again. In 1813 his wife died; for seventeen years she had been ailing and almost out of her mind, yet Crabbe had never ceased to love and cherish her. Before he crossed England to take over a living in Wiltshire, he came back to Aldeburgh for a last visit to one of his sisters. On a lovely day in May he rode over to Parham and Glemham to

wander among the fields and woods he loved so well, and to see once more the houses where he and Sarah had spent such happy years. He did not return till late at night, and in his pocket-book were found these lines:

Yes, I behold again the place,  
The seat of joy, the source of pain;  
It brings in view the form and face  
That I must never see again.

The night-bird's song that sweetly floats  
*On this soft gloom—this balmy air,*  
Brings to the mind her sweeter notes  
That I again must never hear.

Lo! yonder shines that window's light,  
My guide, my token, heretofore;  
And now again it shines as bright,  
When those dear eyes can shine no more.

Then hurry from this place away!  
It gives not now the bliss it gave;  
For death has made its charm his prey,  
And joy is buried in her grave.

With this, one of the best lyrics he ever wrote, I will leave the story of Crabbe, for it concerns Suffolk no more, although, no matter how far away he might be, memories of his youth and his native county continued to influence him and his writings to the end of his life.

I wish he had produced more lyrics like that, for I confess that at times I find his heroics ponderous and artificial. But he did for Suffolk what no one else has even attempted: he told the whole story of her sea,

her rivers, her people, and he told it with a power and sincerity which opened men's eyes to the idyllic hypocrisies of such works as Goldsmith's "Deserted Village", and which gained him undying fame as the pioneer of poetic realism.

It was Crabbe's portrayal of the tragic and the sordid that made such a deep and immediate impression on the world, for here he was at the height of his strength. And of all his varied and elaborate characters none, to my mind, surpasses Peter Grimes of "The Borough", the brutal fisherman suspected of the murder of his apprentices:

Alas! for Peter not a helping hand,  
So was he hated, could he now command;  
Alone he row'd his boat, alone he cast  
His nets beside, or made his anchor fast;  
To hold a rope or hear a curse was none—  
He toil'd and rail'd, he groan'd and swore alone.

Thus by himself compell'd to live each day,  
To wait for certain hours the tide's delay;  
At the same times the same dull views to see,  
The bounding marsh-bank and the blighted tree;  
The water only, when the tides were high,  
When low, the mud half-cover'd and half-dry;  
The sun-burnt tar that blisters on the planks,  
And bank-side stakes in their uneven ranks;  
Heaps of entangled weeds that slowly float,  
As the tide rolls by the impeded boat.

When tides were neap, and, in the sultry day,  
Through the tall bounding mud-banks made their way,  
Which on each side rose swelling, and below  
The dark warm flood ran silently and slow;

There anchoring, Peter chose from man to hide,  
There hang his head, and view the lazy tide  
In its hot slimy channel slowly glide;  
Where the small eels that left the deeper way  
For the warm shore, within the shallows play;  
Where gaping muscles (*sic*), left upon the mud,  
Slope their slow passage to the fallen flood;—  
Here dull and hopeless he'd lie down and trace  
How sidelong crabs had scrawl'd their crooked race,  
Or sadly listen to the tuneless cry  
Of fishing gull or clanging golden-eye;  
What time the sea-birds to the marsh would come,  
And the loud bittern, from the bull-rush home,  
Gave from the salt-ditch side the bellowing boom:  
He nursed the feelings these dull scenes produce,  
And loved to stop beside the opening sluice;  
Where the small stream, confined in narrow bound,  
Ran with a dull, unvaried, sadd'ning sound;  
Where all, presented to the eye or ear,  
Oppress'd the soul with misery, grief, and fear.

It was not for nothing that Byron called him  
“Nature's sternest poet, yet the best.”

### 3. EDWARD FITZGERALD (1809-1883)

In one way "Old Fitz" has a stronger connexion with Suffolk than any of the others about whom I have written. Except for brief visits to France and London in his youth, and spasmodic excursions to his friends, he never left the county at all during the whole of his seventy-four years. "I run back to it like a beaten dog," he used to say. He was born in 1809 at Bredfield House (a plaque to his memory was erected there last summer), which stands within a few hundred yards of what is now the Woodbridge by-pass, and in the neighbourhood of Woodbridge he remained throughout his life. He gave himself up to the river Deben even more devotedly than did John Constable to the river Stour.

Fitz was not even an East Anglian. Compared to Gainsborough, Constable and Crabbe, he did nothing deliberately to immortalize Suffolk; he did it his greatest service simply by living in it. True, Suffolk filled his delightful letters and his poems; it is not to these, however, that he owes his immortality, but to his wonderful translation of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, and that, except for the fact that he wrote it in Suffolk, does not concern me here. And so I shall leave his writings altogether, and shall speak only of his life and of his strange and lovable character.

"We FitzGeralds are all mad," he once declared. He himself was certainly eccentric from his earliest

years; and no wonder, for his parents, besides being Irish, were also first cousins, and his mother was the daughter of first cousins. The whole family lived a life of luxury, dividing their time between Bredfield, London and Paris. The mother, a woman of majestic proportions, drove about in a coach and four; the father owned a house in Portland Place and a box at the Hay-market Theatre; he speculated freely, and spent much of his money on hunting, shooting and politics. Fitz found pleasure in his occasional glimpses of artistic life and in his father's fine collections of pictures, china and furniture; but beyond this, he hated the whole atmosphere of his upbringing. He took no part in sport, he took no interest in politics or society. He turned instead to the countryside, and spent his time wandering about the lanes and making friends with all the queer characters of the neighbourhood. From the first he had a wonderful gift for friendship. At Cambridge he met Thackeray and Fredrick Tennyson and, soon afterwards, Alfred. To the end of their lives these three considered "dear old Fitz" almost their greatest friend, in spite of all differences in habits and mode of living.

From Cambridge he returned, casual, untidy, with a passionate love of music, literature and painting, and with no need whatever to bother himself about earning his living, to settle in Suffolk for good. His family moved from the Deben to the Orwell and back again; Fitz wandered in their wake, staying sometimes with a married sister at Geldestone, sometimes with his friend Bernard Barton, the Quaker poet of Woodbridge; and when the family finally made their home at Bouge Hall, a fine Queen Anne mansion barely two miles

from Bredfield House, Fitz set up in 1837 in a one-storied thatched cottage at the bottom of the drive, determined to rid himself of the last distasteful shackles of convention and to lead his own life in his own way.

An astonishing life it was, too. Clad in a dressing-gown and slippers, surrounded by his books and his pictures, his cat, his dog and his parrot ("Beauty Bob"), Fitz read, wrote, painted, played Handel and Mozart and entertained his strange medley of friends, drawn from all classes of society. But despite this apparent laziness, he never allowed his brain to stagnate or his body to degenerate. Rather did he live every moment of his days and nights with the energy and delight of a boy. The joy which he found in that simple life he has expressed in this lyric, "The Meadows in Spring":

'Tis a dull sight  
To see the year dying,  
When winter winds  
Set the yellow wood sighing:  
Sighing, oh! sighing.

When such a time cometh,  
I do retire  
Into an old room  
Beside a bright fire:  
Oh, pile a bright fire!

And there I sit  
Reading old things,  
Of knights and lorn damsels  
While the wind sings—  
Oh, drearily sings!

I never look out  
 Nor attend to the blast;  
 For all to be seen  
 Is the leaves falling fast:  
 Falling, falling!

But close at the hearth,  
 Like a cricket, sit I,  
 Reading of summer  
 And chivalry—  
 Gallant chivalry!

Then with an old friend  
 I talk of our youth—  
 How 'twas gladsome, but often  
 Foolish, forsooth:  
 But gladsome, gladsome!

Or to get merry  
 We sing some old rhyme,  
 That made the wood ring again  
 In summer time—  
 Sweet summer time!

Then go we to smoking,  
 Silent and snug:  
 Nought passes between us,  
 Save a brown jug—  
 Sometimes!

And sometimes a tear  
 Will rise in each eye,  
 Seeing the two old friends  
 So merrily—  
 So merrily!

## SUFFOLK SCENE

And ere to bed  
 Go we, go we,  
 Down on the ashes  
 We kneel on the knee,  
 Praying together!

Thus, then, live I,  
 Till, 'mid all the gloom,  
 By heaven! the bold sun  
 Is with me in the room  
 Shining, shining!

Then the clouds part,  
 Swallows soaring between;  
 The spring is alive,  
 And the meadows are green!

I jump up like mad,  
 Break the old pipe in twain,  
 And away to the meadows,  
 The meadows again!

The fireside friend was probably the Rev. George Crabbe, vicar of Bredfield and eldest son and biographer of the poet, for whom Fitz had a deep admiration. Fitz and Crabbe were so fond of each other that even Fitz's unsuccessful courtship of the vicar's daughter did not affect in the least the friendship between the two men. Crabbe was a bluff, impetuous and unconventional person, with a lively sense of humour. He would answer an invitation to dine at Boulge in this way:

As sure as a gun  
 I'll be in at the fun:  
 For I'm the old Vicar  
 As sticks to his liquor;

And smokes a cigar  
Like a jolly Jack Tar:  
I've no time for more,  
For the Post's at the door;  
But I'll be there by seven  
And stay till eleven,  
For Boulge is my Heaven!

Fitz, growing ever more eccentric, continued his "pleasant, Robinson Crusoe existence" at Boulge until 1853. Two things sent him in search of new quarters. Firstly, his brother John had settled at the Hall after the death of their father. John was an impassioned preacher of Evangelism, who became so transported during his discourses that he would remove half his clothes, including shoes and stockings, and would even turn out his pockets on to the pulpit. Coming to the Hall, he began to concentrate upon saving poor Fitz from the fires of hell. This was too much for Fitz; "John is the maddest of the family, for he does not know it!" he declared, and speedily removed himself to an old farmhouse between Melton and Woodbridge.

The other reason for his departure was his impending marriage to Miss Lucy Barton, the daughter of his old friend. When he had promised the dying Barton that his daughter should be "provided for", he had not, I think, intended to imply that he would marry her; but the marriage, unfortunately for Fitz, was afterwards taken for granted. It was a disaster. Fitz as a conventional husband, attending social functions and dinner parties, must have been a pathetic and miserable sight. But his wife could not be expected to come round to his own peculiar ways, and so, in 1860, they

parted finally, and Fitz went back to his old life of careless indolence, this time in lodgings in the Market Place at Woodbridge.

And then, well past middle age, he began the most singular phase and the most surprising friendships of all his fantastic career. He had always loved the Deben and the Orwell, and he suddenly became passionately fond of sailing; and not only of sailing, but also of the dialect and companionship of fishermen and pilots. "The Country about here," he wrote, "is the Cemetery of so many of my oldest Friends; and the petty race of Squires who have succeeded only use the Earth for an Investment. . . . So I get to the Water, where Friends are not buried nor Pathways stopt up; but all is, as the Poets say, as Creation's Dawn beheld. I am happiest going in my little Boat round the Coast to Aldbro', with some Bottled Porter and some Bread and Cheese, and *some good rough Soul* who works the Boat and chews his Tobacco in peace. An Aldbro' Sailor talking of my Boat said—'She go like a violin, she do!' What a pretty Conceit, is it not, as the Bow slides over the Strings in a liquid Tune? Another man was talking yesterday of a great Storm: 'and, in a moment, all as calm as a Clock.'" Fitz came to know the fishermen's talk so well that he made a glossary of Suffolk sea-phrases, most of which are in use to this day.

In 1863 he had built for himself a boat called *The Scandal*\*—"scandal," he explained, "is the staple industry of Woodbridge"—whose first skipper, one

\* In 1928 Mr. E. R. Cooper, of Woodbridge, wrote that *The Scandal* was still afloat under the name of *Sapphire*, owned by Mr. Elvin of Woolwich.

Newson, he described as "having his head permanently cocked on one side, like a magpie looking in a quart pot. He is always smiling, yet the wretched fellow is the father of twins." To Newson succeeded a fisherman from Lowestoft, one of the strangest and dearest friends that Fitz ever knew.

"A man of the finest Saxon type—blue eyes, a nose less than Roman, more than Greek, and strictly auburn hair that any woman might sigh to possess. A man of simplicity of soul, justice of thought, tenderness of nature, and a gentleman of Nature's grandest type. The man is Royal, tho' with the faults of ancient Vikings. He looks every inch a King in his lugger. At home (when he is there and not at the Tavern) he sits among his dogs, cats, birds, &c., and always with a great dog following abroad and aboard. Altogether the greatest man I have known." Such was Joseph ("Posh") Fletcher, and Fitz's description of him tallies so perfectly with my own description of Bob, friend of my boyhood days at Aldeburgh, that the two might almost have been father and son.

Having seen Posh Fletcher, imagine Fitz himself at this time, as described by A. C. Benson: "A tall, dreamy-looking man, blue-eyed, with large sensitive lips, and a melancholy expression; his face tanned with exposure to the sun; moving his head as he walked with a remote, almost a haughty air, as though he guarded his own secret; strong and active from much exercise, yet irresolute in his movements; with straggling grey hair, and slovenly in dress, wearing an ancient, battered, black-banded, shiny-edged, tall hat, round which he would in windy weather tie a hand-kerchief to keep it in its place; his clothes of baggy blue

cloth, as though he were a seafarer, his trousers short and his shoes low, exhibiting a length of white or grey stockings. With an unstarched white shirt-front, high, crumpled, stand-up collars, a big, black silk tie in a careless bow; in cold weather trailing a green and black or grey plaid shawl; in hot weather even walking barefoot, with his boots slung to a stick. He never carried an umbrella except in the heaviest rain. Such was the inconsequent appearance presented by Fitz-Gerald at the age of sixty."

This was Fitz on dry land; and on sea and river he was just the same, still clinging to his enormous, battered topper, his fur boa or shawl, his butterfly collar and white stockings. How the fishermen must have marvelled, and how they must have loved him for his oddity, simplicity and sincerity. He was never so happy as when sitting in some coastal tavern, exchanging stories with them hour by hour over grog and pipe.

Fitz and Posh must surely have been the most incongruous couple that ever set sail upon the Deben. Fitz never gave warning of an intended voyage; he would simply come on board in the morning, settle himself full length upon the deck, and spend the whole day smoking, reading Greek or Latin, staring dreamily across the river, or chatting and joking with Posh, who had absolute charge of the navigation. No matter how foul the weather, Fitz refused to go below. One day the boom swept him overboard into Lowestoft harbour, while he was reading a letter; and even then, after he had been hauled aboard looking, as Posh expressed it, "like a soured harrin'," he insisted on remaining on deck, topper and all, until they were

well out to sea, because, as he told Posh, "he jest couldn't get no wetter."

Well might Posh call him "a master rum 'un," yet for ten years he served the "ol' guv'nor" as a loyal skipper and faithful companion. And Fitz on his side was so fond of this rough, handsome fisherman that he commissioned Samuel Laurence to paint his portrait, and hung it in the place of honour between those of Thackeray and Tennyson.

No doubt it was from the speech of Posh that Fitz compiled the greater part of his glossary; and it was from Posh that he learned these three songs, all of which were composed by the skipper of *The Scandal* himself. They are remarkable works for a man who had probably never been to school and who could hardly write his own name, and they show that Posh possessed feeling, imagination and a strong sense of the rhythm and melody of words, which Fitz doubtless did his best to cultivate.

#### *Sea Song*

We are the boys that fear no noise  
Wile (*sic*) trundling (*sic*) cannons roar,  
We go to sea for the yellow-boys  
And spend them when on shore.

(*Top two lines over twice.*)

#### *Corous (*sic*)*

So doant (*sic*) forget your old shipmate, &c.

#### *The Old Pilot Boat*

The old Boat long has lain  
By the deep deep sea:

## SUFFOLK SCENE

She can never sail again  
 On the deep deep sea:  
 The sun has cracked her side,  
 And her seams have opened wide,  
 She never more can ride  
 On the deep deep sea.

*Posh's Song*

I once loved a boy of my own, bonny boy,  
 I loved him, I vow and protest,  
 I loved him so well, so very very well,  
 That I built him a nest on my breast.

The thoughts of green Laurel wept over the plain  
 Like one that was troubled in mind,  
 So I hollared and juped and play'd on my flute,  
 But no bonny Boy could I find.

I looked up high and I looked down low  
 When the sun shone so bright in its charms,  
 And there did I espy my own bonny boy  
 Close confined in another girl's arms.

That girl that enjoy my own bonny boy  
 I am sure she is not to be blamed,  
 For it's many a long night he have disturbed me of rest,  
 But he never shall do it again.

My own bonny boy he is gone far away,  
 He has left me this wide world to tarry,  
 But if he loves another better than me,  
 Shall for his sweet sake I not marry.

Posh also taught him this little verse, which delighted Fitz even more than the songs:

Man that is born of woman  
Has very little time to live;  
He comes up like a foremast staysail  
And down like a flying jib.

It seems that Fitz had a greater appreciation of the songs of Posh than had Posh of the poems of Fitz, for when, years later, someone read to the old skipper this famous verse from the *Rubaiyat*—

The Moving Finger writes; and having writ  
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

—Posh gazed round-eyed, chuckled, slapped his knee, and remarked: “Well, thass a rum ‘un!”

Fitz’s maritime ambitions soon reached beyond *The Scandal*. In 1867 he had built a lugger, the *Meum and Tuum* (*Mum and Tum* to the longshoremen), which was to be worked as a herring-boat. He took Posh into partnership with him, but their enterprise was not a commercial success. I doubt very much whether Fitz himself ever took an active part in the work, for a top hat and butterfly collar at the fishing-grounds would probably have been too much even for the unflinching Posh.

When Posh began to fret at the limitations of partnership, Fitz generously handed over the boat to him. At the same time, however, he took out a mortgage to protect his own interest, partly because Posh, though perfectly honest, refused to keep any accounts of the

profit and loss of the *Mum and Tum*. This action of Fitz's annoyed Posh considerably, for he regarded it as a slur upon his good faith. From that time relations between the skipper and his master were not so easy and friendly as they had been, but the real trouble between them arose in this way:

Posh's great fault was his love of the bottle. Coming in from a cruise, he would make straight for the nearest tavern to regale himself with more rum and beer than Fitz considered good for him. Gently and kindly Fitz tried to cure him of the habit, writing to him such strange and earnest advice as this: "You should take plenty of tea. Some gin and water every night, and no ale or Beer; but only Porter; and not much of that. If you do not choose to buy gin for yourself, buy some for *me*; and keep it on board; and drink some every day or night. Pray remember this and *do it*. Goodbye, Poshy, and believe me always yours to the last half Pint, E. F. G."

All in vain. Posh saw no evil in the bottle. He took this counsel in the wrong spirit, regarding it as absurd and unwarranted interference. His tendencies became worse, until Fitz, seeing that his efforts were hopeless, broke up the partnership in 1874 and sold both *The Scandal* and the *Mum and Tum*. This happening grieved him, I think, as much as anything in his life. But he and Posh never quite lost their fondness for each other; they arranged meetings occasionally, and Fitz continued to write long letters to his erstwhile skipper.

Poor Posh drifted into very low water towards the end of his life. In 1908 he applied for the old age pension, and endorsed his form: "Earning nothing—

shrimping and long-shore fishing a poor trade." He ended his days in the Lowestoft workhouse in 1915.

He had outlived the "ol' guv'nor" by more than thirty years. Fitz died in 1883, not at his last Suffolk home, Littlegrange Farm, near Woodbridge (which he had spent nearly ten years adapting to his own mysterious requirements), but, by a strange coincidence, at the Norfolk rectory of George Crabbe the third, grandson of the poet. His body was brought home to his beloved Suffolk, and buried near the foot of the tower in Boulge churchyard.

In 1876 Tennyson had paid a long visit to Littlegrange. Fitz would not hear of him sleeping at the house, but insisted on boarding him out at the Bull Inn in Woodbridge. Soon after leaving Suffolk, Tennyson wrote "*Tiresias*", and dedicated it to Fitz with a Preface which began:

Old Fitz, who from your suburb grange,  
Where once I tarried for a while,  
Glance at the wheeling Orb of change,  
And greet it with a kindly smile . . .

But before "*Tiresias*" could be published, Old Fitz was at rest in Boulge churchyard. Tennyson, when he heard of the death of his lifelong friend, added an Epilogue to the poem, ending with these lines:

Gone into darkness, that full light  
Of friendship! past, in sleep, away  
By night, into the deeper night!  
The deeper night? A clearer day  
Than our poor twilight dawn on earth—  
If night, what barren toil to be!

What life, so maim'd by night, were worth  
Our living out? Not mine to me  
Remembering all the golden hours  
Now silent, and so many dead,  
And him the last: and laying flowers,  
This wreath, above his honour'd head,  
And praying that, when I from hence  
Shall fade with him into the unknown,  
My close of earth's experience  
May prove as peaceful as his own.

#### 4. GEORGE BORROW (1803-1881)

We cannot really claim George Borrow. It is impossible to pin him down to any county. The son of a Cornish father and a Huguenot mother, he was born at East Dereham in Norfolk, but he stayed there only a few years. His father was a captain in the army, and the family led a restless life. From Dereham they went to Scotland, Ireland, and half a dozen different places in England; finally they returned to Norwich, and Borrow, though barely seventeen years old, had already crammed a volume of adventure into his life. On his father's death in 1824 he left Norwich to embark upon the wanderings which made him famous. Thus ends his connexion with Norfolk, and I think that Suffolk can stake a far stronger claim than that, for in Suffolk he spent the longest stationary period of his life, and it was there that he wrote the most famous of his masterpieces. And besides this, the heroine of *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye* was born in Suffolk—Belle Berners, one of the greatest figures (greatest both in body and soul) ever created in England's literature, who came from the Great House (the workhouse) at Long Melford.

If you know nothing of the works and travels of this strange and romantic man, perhaps the most fascinating personality of the last century, then this short sketch will hardly enlighten you. I do not intend to

summarize that life of grotesque vagrancy which he himself has written in full, but only to continue the tale from the point where it begins to link up with Suffolk. By the time he reached Suffolk he had mastered more than forty languages, he had wandered all over England and Wales, he had explored every corner of Europe and the greater part of Asia, he had lived in St. Petersburg in order to translate the New Testament into Manchu, he had spent four perilous years trying to distribute the Scriptures throughout Spain on behalf of the Bible Society. He had, in fact, lived that part of his extraordinary life with which the whole world is familiar; and from Spain, then in the ferment of civil war, he returned to the lonely shores of Oulton Broad, there to settle down to an existence of unaccustomed mildness and to direct all his energies to the writing of *The Zincali*, *The Bible in Spain*, *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*.

It is at Oulton that my account of him begins. He was still a young man—only thirty-seven—but all the grand adventures related in his books were already behind him. Those adventures are his background, and to understand his life at Oulton it is essential that you should have read something of them. At Oulton he was a lion caged, a vagabond at anchor; instead of a wild, wandering philologist, he became a landed proprietor with a wife and stepdaughter. But the ties of a family and a small estate only accentuated the strangeness of his character, and he was certainly the most eccentric “squire” that Oulton has ever known.

His appearance alone was quite enough to overcome the more timid members of the neighbourhood. He stood just six feet two inches in his socks and,

though lean and spare, his shoulders were broad and his strength and agility phenomenal. This huge man, of whom Watts-Dunton wrote that he was "built as perfectly as a Greek statue, an almost faultless model of masculine symmetry," had a smooth, oval face, as soft and rosy as that of a young girl. One of his bitter enemies, old Mrs. Herne the gipsy, described it in *Lavengro* as "a countenance of singular and outrageous ugliness." But one of his friends, writing after Borrow's death, said that his features were of perfect Græco-Roman type and that "for power and beauty, they can have no parallel in our portrait gallery." Handsome or ugly, his face was strangely young and luminous, neither lined nor tanned by his adventures; and above it and about it there tumbled a great thatch of wild, white hair. Borrow tells us that his hair turned white when he was barely twenty. But stranger than this, stranger even than his soft, pink face, were his eyes. They were black as sloes, round, small, very bright and clear. They expressed every mood of his stormy and hypnotic nature; from the cloudy sullenness of despair they would change in an instant to the radiant flash of joy, from the fierce darkness of anger to the quiet glow of tenderness and sympathy.

Small wonder that, when such a singular giant as this strode into Oulton, the little boys scattered helter-skelter, peered wide-eyed from behind the safest refuge and held their breath as he passed. Borrow laughed. He loved children. He liked to watch the effect of his personality upon them. Years afterwards a lady wrote of him: "When I was a child . . . he would sometimes sing one of his Romany songs, shake his fist at me and look quite wild. Then he would ask: 'Aren't you

afraid of me?" "No, not at all," I would say. Then he would look just as gentle and kind, and say, "God bless you, I would not hurt a hair of your head."

And of course Borrow gathered round him at Oulton a *ménage* suitable to his character. Not that there was anything odd about his wife or his stepdaughter Henrietta—"Old Hen"—to both of whom he was devoted. But his personal servant was a young Jew from Fez, who must have added considerably to the aura of mystery which tinged Borrow's every action in the eyes of the neighbourhood. Sitting in the dim evenings in his little octagonal summer-house on the edge of the Broad, poring over the manuscript of *Lavengro*, staring at his shelves of books or his father's sword hung upon the wall, he would cry to the Jew in deep, rumbling tones: "Bring lights hither, O Hayim Ben Attar, son of the miracle!" The great voice would roll out across the calm waters of Oulton, and a man passing by would pause and mutter to himself and hurry on his way. Or perhaps he would stop in astonishment as Borrow tore out of the summer-house and flung himself into the lake, staying under water for a minute or more, and spluttering and shouting when at last his great white head bobbed dripping on the surface.

But even more remarkable than the Jew from Fez was Borrow's entourage of animals. He loved all animals, and described himself as "silly enough to feel disgust and horror at the squeals of a rat in the fangs of a terrier." He kept cats, dogs and horses. Favourite among the horses was "Sidi Habsimilk"—"My Lord, the Sustainer of the Kingdom"—a noble Arab stallion who had borne him faithfully through all

the hazards of his work in Spain and who followed him everywhere with the meek watchfulness of a dog. Borrow had a magical power over horses. If a young horse came up for sale in the district he bought it simply for the joy of breaking it, or, as he would say, of *charming* it, and the fiercer its spirits the keener his delight in the struggle. "What a contemptible trade is the author's compared to that of the jockey!" he would exclaim, as he flung down his pen and rushed into the paddock to grapple with some savage beast that "kills everybody who mounts him." There was never a horse bred that could withstand for long the strength of his will and the subtlety of his influence. Sometimes, when strolling with a caller in the garden, he would give a sudden whistle, and two beautiful Arabs would at once bound over the low paddock wall and come trotting towards him, fawning and frisking, nuzzling and snuffing at his hands and coat.

So much for Borrow's household. As to his habits and manners, they made him loved or hated on sight. A man either submitted to him or fled from him, perhaps in terror of submission. He was proud, self-opinionated, masterful, moody, tempestuous. It mattered little to him what impression he made upon his fellow men and women. For an hour on end he would fascinate a dinner-party with some wild and wonderful tale of romance; ten minutes later he would insult his hostess to her face and march storming out of the room, to walk like a madman to some pub a dozen miles away, there to soothe his anger with three pints of ale. Footmen quaked at his mighty knock, maids trembled as they thrust a dish before him. No one could foresee his next move—a thunderous laugh, a bellow

of disgust, a glare of silent and appalling fury. When one Suffolk authoress timidly offered to present him with twelve volumes of her book *The Queens of England*, he replied with a shout: "For God's sake don't, madam, I shouldn't know where to put them or what to do with them!" and he added in a loud voice to a friend beside him, "What a damned fool that woman is!" He used to say that there were only three celebrities in the world whom he wished to meet; one was Daniel O'Connell, another was "Lamplighter", the Derby winner; both these escaped him by their death. The third was the learned Norfolk lady, Anna Gurney, and one day he called on her at her home at North Repps. She handed him an Arabic grammar and asked him to decipher some difficult point. He tried; and while he tried, she talked to him incessantly. Exasperated, he flung down the book and ran from the house, and never stopped running until he reached Old Tucker's inn at Cromer, where he ate "five excellent sausages."

Such was his treatment of the gentry. Towards his own vicar he behaved even more rudely. The two carried on an interminable feud because of the quarrels of their respective dogs, and Borrow, after writing at length of the unjust treatment of his "harmless house-dog", would end one of his letters in this way: "Circumstances over which Mr. Borrow has at present no control will occasionally bring him and his family under the same roof with Mr. Dennis (the vicar); that roof, however, is the roof of the House of God, and the prayers of the Church of England are wholesome from whatever mouth they may proceed."

Almost the only friend with whom Borrow never

quarrelled was Old Fitz, who occasionally came from Woodbridge to see him, corresponded with him, and sent him a copy of the *Rubaiyat*—a great honour, since Fitz sent it only to two other people. They must have made a strange pair. I think that Fitz took good care to maintain the friendship at a safe distance, because he found Borrow's tremendous eccentricity and irascible nature too overbearing for his own whimsical mildness.

It is hardly surprising that Borrow never achieved his ambition of becoming a J.P. He hated and despised the gentle-folk around him. Half his life and works were devoted to satirizing “gentility nonsense”, and when he came to Oulton his habits and his outlook remained basically the same. For one thing, he never got rid of the old restlessness that had urged him on to the fantastic wanderings and adventures of his youth. He walked fiercely and aimlessly all over East Anglia; he rode twenty miles or more before breakfast; when suffering from sleeplessness, or after an attack of the “Horrors” (that dreaded melancholia, a kind of epileptic fit, which dogged him all through his life), he would walk the twenty-five miles to Norwich and return the next night. Once he calmed his spirit by walking from Norwich to London in twenty-seven hours, spending only 5½d. on the way. And sometimes he would say to his wife at breakfast-time: “I am going for a walk,” and he would then disappear not for a couple of hours, but for as long as three months on end, taking nothing with him but the clothes in which he had left the house. On one of these occasions he walked into Scotland and back, and never slept beneath a roof during the whole journey. In 1844, while writing *Lavengro*, he could withstand his

craving no longer, and left England for seven months to wander all over Eastern Europe.

If these strange ways of his astonished his sedentary neighbours, the company that he kept shocked irreparably their sense of "gentility", so that Borrow, if not quite an outcast—no one would have dared openly to ostracize such a man—was shunned as a dangerous and crazy fellow better left to his own devices. His closest friends were, as they had always been, the gipsies. His power with gipsies was even more miraculous than his power with horses. He sympathized with them because they were pariahs; he was drawn to them because of their eternal war against that "gentility nonsense" which he hated so bitterly. But his feelings for them were more than those of sympathy and attraction. He had a real and deep kinship with them; he loved and understood this race of slinking, roguish nomads as few men have ever done. He had "brothers" amongst them; he shared their life and almost became one of them; he even used their accents and intonation unintentionally when talking with strangers. He knew their failings well enough, and he never over-estimated their friendship; but he found in them the expression of that romantic and mysterious excitement for which his imagination was continually striving. And as for them, they respected him, liked him, felt that he was at once their master and their friend; he was the gipsy gentleman, and "Everybody as see'd the white-headed Romany Rye never forgot him."

At Oulton he sought them out and encouraged them to settle on his land. For half the night he would sit with them round their camp-fires, laughing, shouting,

telling stories and singing songs; sometimes he would take a favoured guest to visit them, for he delighted in showing off his prowess. He could order their moods as he wished, making them laugh or weep, fight or dance, according to his own temper. In a malicious moment he would sing some Romany song of his own composition, telling of all their wickedness and trickery. The gipsies would first become sullen, then excited, and finally they would fall to rage and fighting. And then Borrow would quell them with one fierce glance and a curt, imperious phrase.

This disgusting conviviality with the scum of East Anglia was altogether too much for the gentry. Borrow caught any sneers which came his way and flung them back with sharper sting into the mouths that gave them; and how he must have laughed at the scandalized looks which greeted his latest Romany chant! He could withstand all the evil machinations of the gentry—except Sir Samuel Morton Peto's railway, which that gentleman, backed by an Act of Parliament, constructed between Reedham and Lowestoft, cutting right across the little Oulton estate on the way.

Fierce and bitter was Borrow's struggle. Dreadful was his anger. But it was all to no purpose; Parliament and Sir Samuel prevailed. He never forgave them, and upon Sir Samuel he revenged himself by that pungent and incisive attack in *The Romany Rye*, which every Borrowian knows by heart.

It has been said of Borrow that "his life was built upon a wrong hypothesis; he strove to adapt, not himself to the universe, but the universe to himself." The railway was beyond his power; it defeated him, and in despair he fled from Oulton in 1853. More

than twenty years went by before he returned to live there.

During this time he probably paid many visits to Oulton. He was there a few days after the death of his wife in 1869, and went straight from London to Norwich to bring back his solicitor to the house, where George Crabbe (grandson of the poet, in whose home Old Fitz had died) and his wife were awaiting them. This was the manner of their home-coming:

"He was silent all the way. When we got to the little white wicket gate before the approach to the house he took off his hat and began to beat his breast like an Oriental. He cried aloud all the way up the path. He calmed himself, however, by the time that Mr. Crabbe had opened the door and asked us in. Crabbe brought in some wine, and we all sat down to table. I sat opposite to Mrs. Crabbe; her husband was on my left hand. Borrow sat at one end of the table, and the chair at the opposite end was left vacant. We were talking in a casual way when Borrow, pointing to the empty chair, said with profound emotion, 'There! It was there that I first saw her.' It was a curious coincidence that though there were four of us we should have left that particular seat unoccupied at a little table of about four feet square."

Borrow's love for his wife had been deep and sincere. From the time of her death his life was finished so far as the world was concerned. In 1874, resigning himself to the hateful railway, he retired to Oulton for ever, there to end his days as a figure pathetic in its fierce, proud loneliness. He wrote no more; he battled grimly on towards the end, dreaming of the thousand adventures which even in his old age had not quieted his

restlessness. He still sought out the gipsies and vagabonds; he still plunged roaring into the lake in mid-winter, as if its very iciness only spurred him to eternal victory; like an old eagle taking its last desperate flight, he still strode furiously about the lanes, clad in a broad-brimmed hat and a Spanish cloak, a fierce, shaggy sheepdog padding at his heels. The furies of this mighty wanderer were terrible indeed. Now the little boys shivered and ran from him, never stopping to peep, as if they had seen a great bogey, and now the servants were too frightened to open the door to him, and hardly could one be found brave enough to wait upon him in his own home. None dared to speak to him; he terrified the whole neighbourhood. Perhaps it was his triumph, and perhaps he laughed even then.

But he was lonely—lonely and sad and tragic, struggling on in his dreary, pitiless isolation. Towards the end his faithful stepdaughter, "Old Hen", and her husband came to take care of him. One summer morning they drove into Lowestoft, and when they returned they found him dead. He who had lived alone half his life was alone at the last.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### EPILOGUE

#### SUFFOLK'S RISE AND FALL

I DO not intend to give you a full history of Suffolk before and during the days of its prosperity. All I shall do is tell you very briefly of what led up to that prosperity, of the decline which began, alas, a long while ago, and introduce you to various places which have a particular bearing on the story.

You will no doubt be as surprised as I was to hear that there were probably people in Suffolk in 500,000 B.C. What they did or what they looked like I have no idea. So far as I know, the relic that most nearly links us with those far-distant days is a curious structure reputed to be a wind-shelter, discovered by Mr. Reid Moir near Ipswich. It is regarded as the oldest building raised by man in the country. Apart from the Druidic forest on Butley Heath, the best evidence of prehistoric Suffolk is to be found in the stone implements and the quarries of Breckland. If you want to see an authentic arrowhead, go to Brandon, where the Stone Age is still very much alive. In that delightful little town flint is knapped to-day by exactly the same process as when its uses were first discovered.

Of the Roman Occupation there is little to be said. I do not know whether Boadicea, Queen of the Iceni, ever fought in Suffolk; she belonged strictly to Essex. But the Iceni themselves may well have given their names to villages such as Icklingham, Ixworth, Ickworth, Iken, and to the Icknield Way which runs across Breckland. A lasting tribute to the power and skill of the Romans is Burgh Castle, the ruined fort at the head of the Waveney.

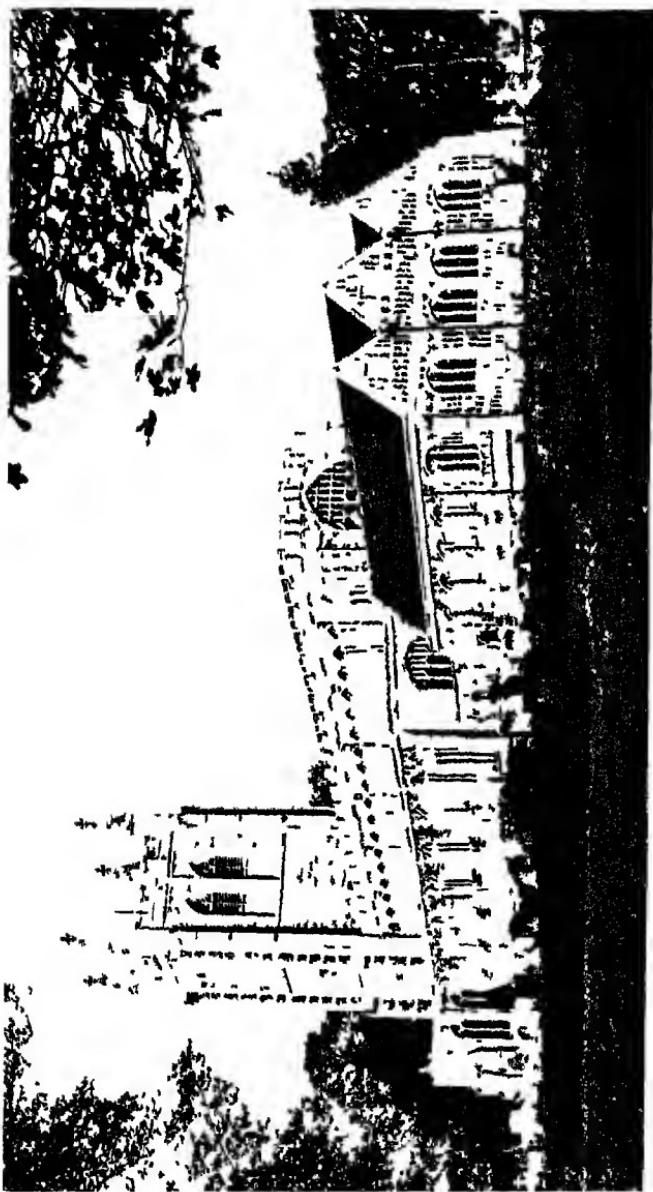
Thus, and not very thrilling, Suffolk to the time of the Saxons. With the Saxons the county at once took on a certain character and importance. In the seventh century Christianity reached the Suffolk shores, and with it came a grand company of saints: Redwald, who had a palace on the site of what is now the Inebriates' Home at Rendlesham, Sigebert, Anna, Jurmin, Botolph, Withburga, and, alone remembered of them all, the great Edmund, whose sorry life and murder by the Danes I have already told in full. Actually, the most important of the saints was Felix, who came over from Burgundy and was installed by Sigebert as the first East Anglian bishop. He it was who drove Christianity into the minds of the people: he founded the great see of Dunwich in 636. I just stopped myself telling the story of Dunwich when writing about the coast, but I am not going to stop myself now. Although it has been told before, I feel that a book on Suffolk would hardly be complete without it.

Dunwich was a Roman station, and very likely a large and comfortable town when Felix established his bishopric. The importance of Felix's choice must have been tremendous: churches sprang up almost

overnight; Dunwich became a kind of Canterbury, maintaining a long succession of bishops and combining religion and industry to such purpose that it stood head and shoulders above any other city in East Anglia. After forty years the see became so large that it was divided, half of it being established at South Elmham St. Cross, near the Waveney; then, when Dunwich had been the centre of Christianity for two hundred years, the Danes swept across the North Sea and destroyed every religious building they could find. That settled the see of Dunwich: it disappeared for good and all. However, the loss of its see does not seem to have worried the town in the least. On the contrary, it went steadily on its way to even greater prosperity.

In those days it had a river—the Blyth, which now runs out at Walberswick. It also had a fine harbour and a considerable fishery, and was entered in Domesday Book as worth a yearly tribute to the King of £50 and sixty thousand herrings. But even at the time of the Conquest a certain influence was gaining ground against which the men of Dunwich were powerless. It is recorded that they appealed to William to defend their great King's Forest from that fearful pillager, the sea.

For some while the sea appears to have remained in abeyance. Dunwich progressed from strength to strength; it had a mint, and it maintained a large fleet. Nobody seems to know how many churches it possessed, but there were probably at least a dozen, besides a Franciscan and a Dominican Monastery, a Templars' Church and a Hospital. In 1173 the Earl of Leicester, with Hugh Bigod, the King's sons and



LONG MELFORD CHURCH

One of the largest parish churches in England. There is elegance, grace and balance in all its thousand details and ninety-seven windows.

C de Paula



the Flemish army, tried to take Dunwich during their rebellion against Henry II; but they were so dismayed at the strength of the fortifications that they retired without a blow being struck. Soon after this King John gave the town its first charter; the cost of it was three hundred marks, ten falcons and five gerfalcons, and one of its most important items allowed the burgesses to marry their sons and daughters as they wished.

Dunwich was now at the full flood of its importance, and its port must have overshadowed all others on the coast. Then, in 1287, a storm so damaged the resources of the town that the great fleet was reduced to eleven ships of war, sixteen fairships, twenty trading ships and twenty-four small ships for the home fishery. But far worse was to come. In 1328 the whole harbour was destroyed, and the fishery was no more—yet in the face of this calamity Dunwich could still send six ships to the siege of Calais. It was about the last force that the town ever supplied, for on the French coast it lost the best part of its fleet, five hundred men, and more than a thousand pounds' worth of merchandise.

Henceforth the story is tragedy upon tragedy. Blythburgh opened a large harbour (doomed to destruction, like all the others) while Dunwich, so lately the proudest port on the North Sea, sat back and groaned at its own defeat. During Edward III's reign the town lost most of its shops and windmills, and the astonishing number of four hundred houses. The sea took everything—cliffs, houses, churches, harbour, river, roads. In the sixteenth century not one quarter of the old town was standing; in 1677 the sea came roaring into the market-place; in 1715 it undermined

the gaol; in 1729 it swished one of the last of the churches over the cliff.

In 1740 came the most shocking storm of all. It raged for days on end, levelling the Cock and Hen hills, fifty feet high, as if they were a couple of sandcastles. Between these hills it rooted up a cemetery, depositing on the mud for the enjoyment of the wretched inhabitants a number of well-preserved skeletons. What few buildings were left by this appalling visitation of the sea have been steadily disappearing for the last two hundred years.

I know of no other place in England which has been reduced so completely from splendour into nothingness. The sea has done its work magnificently; and to drive home the irony it has allowed itself the leisure of the centuries to put the finishing touches to the annihilation of Dunwich. The last of the fine old churches, All Saints', nearly one hundred and fifty feet long, was permitted to stand, a lonely symbol of departed glory, until this very century. Half of it went over in 1904. The tower remained; and then that, too, quietly disappeared over the cliff in 1919. Now there is literally nothing left for the sea to take, for Dunwich exists only in a few small cottages stretching up the hill beside the marsh. It is a place without industry, without hope, without support. When first you see those cottages called Dunwich, the story that I have just told you will seem fantastic and unfounded, because there is nothing to speak for it. But there is one thing. On top of the cliff is a field, the cricket-field of Dunwich, enclosed by solid flint walls, in which are set two beautiful arched gateways. These are the scant remains of the great Franciscan Priory. And above them is a

wood called Grey Friars, a dark and silent wood, in which, if you search closely enough, you will find the crumbling suspicions of a wall hidden by thick ivy. Such are the existing traces of old Dunwich; the rest is in the sea; and any villager will tell you that if you want to amuse yourself on a summer afternoon you have only to take a rowing-boat a quarter of a mile from the shore to hear the muffled bells of fifty churches tolling beneath you.

All this has taken me a very long way from the time of the Saxons, but I have always thought that the story of Dunwich symbolized the whole story of Suffolk itself. On the sites of pagan temples the Saxons built Suffolk's first churches. The Danes destroyed them. The Saxons put them up again, and with such zeal that more than five hundred were recorded in Domesday Book. Crude they were, no doubt, but the actual building of them must have been solid enough.

The outstanding Saxon relics are the round church towers. I cannot say that they are all Saxon; in fact, I have been told that most of them are Norman; but there is no doubt that a fair proportion date back to the tenth and eleventh centuries. I wonder how many of Suffolk's visitors realize that there are any round towers in the county at all. A man who wrote an article on Suffolk churches in *The Times* not long ago said that he thought they were only found in Ireland. If he had really set out to explore he would have unearthed forty-two in Suffolk and a hundred and twenty-five in Norfolk; but it would have been an exhausting exploration, for the round towers are (with a few exceptions) congregated in the most difficult and concealed part of the county—the valley of the Waveney.

Why they were built is something of a mystery; it may have been that, grouped as they were round the estuaries, they served as defences against the Danish raiders, on the same principle as the Peel Towers of the Border country; or it may simply have been a matter of economy, for a round flint tower needed no shaped stone at the corners to hold it together.

In shape and size they are an odd mixture. Some are squat and thick, others tall and thin, like cigarettes fixed to match-boxes. The most perfect to the eye is probably that of the little Norman church at Barsham, above the Waveney marshes, while the most gaunt and uncouth is that at Wortham, near the source of the river. The round tower of Wortham is the largest of its kind in England; it is sixty feet high and thirty feet in diameter, and the walls are four feet thick. It is ruined, crumbled and entirely disused. Its one remaining bell is housed in a green wooden turret on the roof—the others were sold when the upper part of the tower collapsed in 1780. Near the base of the tower are a number of gaps and recesses, both natural and artificial; when I crawled through one of them and peered at the distant circle of daylight I imagined myself looking up the funnel of a gigantic liner. From every crevice in the walls a colony of jackdaws began swearing at me, as if I were the only human being who had invaded the seclusion of that old deserted tower since the beginning of the year.

Suffolk churches are a volume in themselves—a volume which, I freely confess, I am not competent to write. The history of their building and the analysis of their architecture you will have to seek elsewhere. I like churches for the shape of them, the setting of

C. de Paula

Architecturally perhaps the most perfect of them all Its proportion is exact to the last inch, and the blended smoothness of each knapped flint gives it a marvellous look of polish and uniformity



LAVENHAM CHURCH



thcm, their splendour or their quaintness; they satisfy and delight me; but of their technical details I know next to nothing, and if I were to attempt such explanations here I should but be floundering out of my depth. Besides, the history of Suffolk churches has already been written so completely that I cannot possibly add anything to it, and I have no wish to repeat the gleanings of others.

Odd and lovely things attract me in churches: the Great Doom at Wenhampton; the font-covers at Worlingworth and Ufford; the tombs at Dennington, Framlingham and Wingfield; the bench ends at Fressingfield and Woolpit; the humorous inscriptions at Bramfield and Boxford; at Boxford again the brass of a child asleep in a four-poster bed, and at Lavenham the tiny one of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. These and a hundred other strange objects I have seen in various corners of the county. I must have visited three-quarters of the churches in Suffolk; but I search their interiors for the effects of shape and light and delicacy, and not to hold post-mortems on their anatomies.

There are five churches in Suffolk that move me deeply by their very vastness. When first I saw them I felt that strange bewilderment and paralysis of feeling which strikes us when we stand before something so far outside the compass of our senses that we cannot at once adjust it to our own limitations. Until the immediate shock has passed away we are numb; we cannot adequately express our reactions, because we have not disentangled them and scarcely know what they are. Even now, though I have come to know those churches so well that every line of them is fixed

in my mind, I can never see them without a slight recurrence of that prostration, and perhaps a twinge at the thought of my own futility and impotence. They are so detached in their glory, so impossible to associate with man. Once I have shaken off their influence I smile to think that they were raised from flint and plaster by hearty British workmen with red faces and rough hands.

The first of the five churches is Stoke-by-Nayland. It is the one that I like most, but as I have already described it I will not attempt to picture it again. It is wild and rough, like a great unclipped horse; there is much old, faded brickwork among its flint; its tower is so tall that it almost leans over the Stour valley; John Constable painted a stormy water-colour of it—and no description of mine can rival that.

Of the rest, two are in west Suffolk and two in the east. One, Long Melford, I have spoken of before. Poised on top of the sloping village green, there is elegance, grace and balance in all its thousand details and ninety-seven windows. If the Lady Chapel is included it is about two hundred and forty feet long, and must be one of the largest parish churches in England. With the exception of Boston in Lincolnshire, I have never been inside a church which was so nearly a cathedral.

Lavenham, the other church in west Suffolk, is architecturally perhaps the most perfect of them all. Its proportion is exact to the last inch, and the blended smoothness of each knapped flint gives it a marvellous look of polish and uniformity. It is rather strange that the tower, which is a hundred and forty-one feet high

and the tallest in the county, seems far below that of Stoke, although the latter is actually shorter by twenty feet; perhaps this is because the tower of Lavenham is more thickly built and has no pinnacles. Pinnacles would ruin it. Compared to McIxford, the whole church seems heavier and more massive.

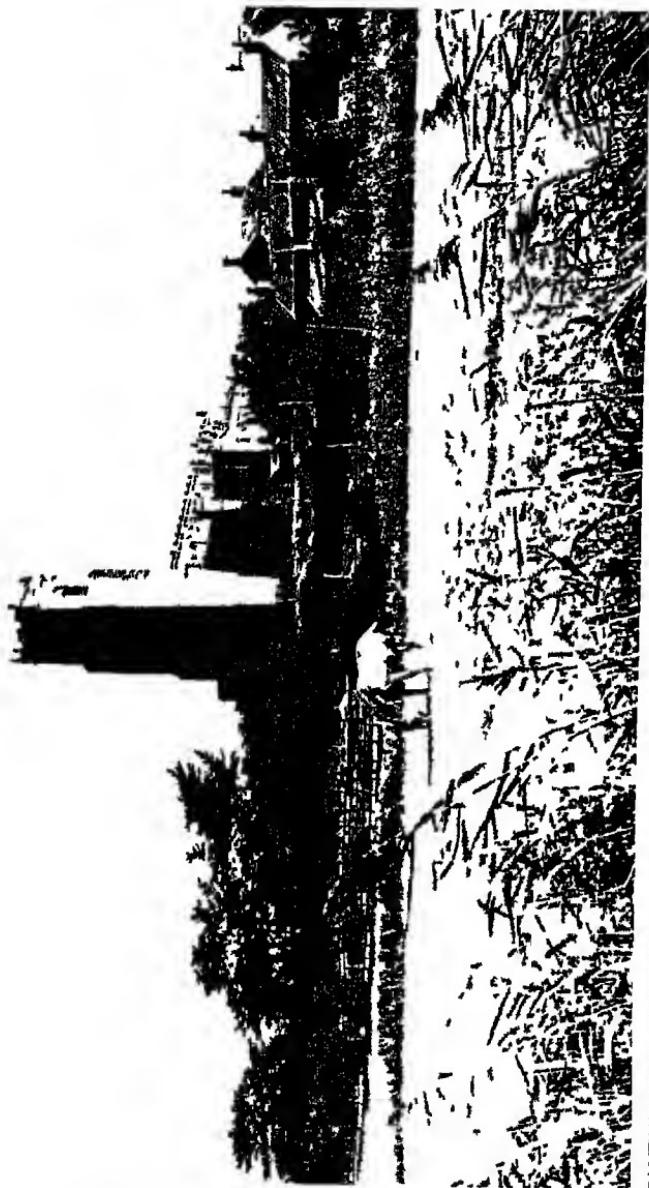
Now to east Suffolk. Grandest of the churches there is Blythburgh, not quite comparable in size to Long McIxford or Lavenham, but having a finer position than either of them. To my mind its position doubles its loveliness. McIxford and Lavenham stand at the top of steep hills above large villages; Blythburgh stands on a knoll beside the river, in the midst of a great ocean of marsh and heath, brooding graciously over the few small cottages that are the pitiable relics of a once wealthy port. It is the loneliest church in Suffolk, and for that reason it is to me the most beautiful; and it seems to me the most delicate and exquisite, because the lines of its whole glorious symmetry are seen for miles on all sides perfectly traced against the sky, miraculously contrasted with the wilderness of flat marsh and untidy heath from which they rise. For many years Blythburgh was in danger of being submerged in that wilderness; it toppled to the edge of ruin and disintegration; but it has now been so well restored that its pride and beauty seem stronger than ever before.

Last of all comes Dennington. If Blythburgh is sublime and dramatic in its loneliness, then Dennington is splendid in its desolation. It has no grand position; it is hidden by trees in a little inland village in the heart of Suffolk's wildest and least-known country. It has no grace, no delicacy, no outstanding

beauty of line or form; beside Melford and Blyburgh it is like a bulldog to a borzoi. Its masonry is a haphazard mixture of flint and plaster and brick, and it is splashed untidily with patches of ivy. It is so sadly crumbled and decayed that you feel it must inevitably collapse into shapeless, powdery heaps; and yet at the next glance it is so squat and thick and strong and solid that it seems clamped down upon the earth for all time.

So there are the five great churches of Suffolk. Others there may be that are as fine or finer to the expert's eye; but it is those five that I immediately call to mind when I think of Suffolk churches in general. And it is those five that I am never tired of seeing, simply to pay homage to their very magnificence. I began by saying that I liked Stoke-by-Nayland the best, but I cannot definitely and fairly choose any one above the others. I cannot compare them, because they are all so unlike; each is different in its look, in its character, in the impression that it makes on you—although that impression is fundamentally the same. The decay and desolation of Dennington are to me just as beautiful as the richness and elegance of Long Melford; the noble loneliness of Blyburgh is just as affecting as the smooth perfection of Lavenham. I cannot decide between them. If I argue with myself for a year I shall but find a host of new aspects and impressions to confuse me the more, and if I do commit myself to a conclusion I shall only want to refute it the next moment.

Soon after the Conquest Suffolk's prosperity began to increase, and the building of churches advanced accordingly. Both reached their peak during the



#### BLYTHBURGH CHURCH

To my mind its position doubles its loveliness; it stands on a knoll beside the river, in the midst of a great ocean of marsh and heath

C. de Paula



fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when Suffolk thrived on one great industry—weaving. Not even the fearsome calamity of the Black Death, which destroyed more than a third of the county's inhabitants, could put a check to its progress. The rich men of Suffolk, the merchants and the guilds of traders and craftsmen, made their influence felt and their charity apparent not by endowing a village hall or presenting a piece of land, but by building and embellishing a church large enough to put that of their neighbours' to shame. If the existing church was impracticable for the scale of their plans, they simply destroyed it and built in its place something that would satisfy both their vanity and their philanthropy. That is why Suffolk to-day is studded with churches colossal and deserted, hopelessly out of proportion to the size of their parishes. There is nothing pretentious or absurd about them; I don't remember an ugly church in the county; yet I can well imagine some disgruntled clothier of five hundred years ago, forced to take second place, declaiming to his friends on the sheer vulgarity of the enormous building in the next parish. Not the church alone, but everything about it, was maintained on a scale of majestic splendour. The services were held in a ferment of colour—processions bearing exquisite and dazzling banners, embroidered cloths draping the font and the sacred vessels of gold and silver, the priest and his satellites resplendent in lavish robes, the glow of bright glass and richly painted walls. Strange indeed would such a service seem to a Suffolk man of to-day. As a contrast think of Crabbe's grim descriptions: "The half-sung sermon and the half-groaned hymn."

Henry VIII and Edward VI ruthlessly stamped out the pageantry of the churches. Mary in some measure restored it; but a hundred years later the Puritans let loose an avalanche of destruction which stripped the county of most of the wealth and beauty it possessed. Under the infamous William Dowsing of Laxfield everything splendid and precious was reviled, confiscated and lost for ever. Yet not quite everything; the inhabitants hid what they could, and they even buried what they could not otherwise dispose of. These few treasures were afterwards returned to their proper homes; and for their rarity they are all the more priceless to-day.

So the glory of the Suffolk churches came to a decisive and calamitous end. They were left gaunt and naked and lonely, like a fine crop swept bare by a plague. From that day to this they have never altered, except that some of them have decayed within and without, while others have suffered the misguided restoration of recent centuries.

An even more frightful cataclysm descended upon the monasteries; but all that is common knowledge, and need not be detailed here. The richer they were, the more surely were they earmarked by Henry VIII when he launched the Dissolution. Where there had been fifty, flourishing and contented, there were, after a few years of callous spoliation, none at all. Most of their remains have by now mouldered away into the earth; some, like Bury and Leiston, are preserved as grand and mighty ruins; some, like Butley and Clare, have been fortunate enough to be reconditioned in part by private persons; and others, like Sibton, amaze you in that they have managed to stand at all,

for they have been so long forgotten and neglected that their fishponds are clotted with weeds, their arches are weighed down by generations of gnawing ivy, and their halls, refectories and cloisters are nothing more than crumbled walls enclosing gardens of wild trees and shrubs.

I know one abbey which has undergone the most strange evolutions. It is at Bruisyard, a tiny village in the wilds of east Suffolk. Founded in 1354, it was first a monastery and later, when the monks had been turned out "owing to certayne complaints", it became for the best part of two centuries a prosperous nunnery of the Order of St. Clare, which had only three convents in the whole of England. At the Dissolution it went the way of all the others, and was presented by the King to one Nicholas Hare. He pulled it down, used some of the material to build a chantry chapel for the tiny parish church and incorporated the rest in the beautiful Tudor manor house with which he replaced the original abbey. Hare's family lived in this manor until 1611, and since then it has been part of the estate of the Earl of Stradbroke. It is now a farmhouse, and the huge, airy rooms which may once have been the nuns' cells have been turned into dormitories for the labourers. I have explored every corner of that old house; it is full of strange and interesting things of which I cannot begin to tell you now. Its origin as an abbey is just recognizable, for there are still a few stone arches and buttresses set in the brick walls. There is the fishpond, too; and the nuns' graveyard, somewhere in which are buried two daughters-in-law of Edward III, is now an orchard, grazed and mired by the farmer's pigs and cattle. The

monastery of Bruisyard has drifted by curious channels indeed to its present humble service; it is solid and strong enough, and will no doubt continue to house a farmer and his men long after many of the ruined Suffolk abbeys have been wholly absorbed by the earth.

The story of the churches really tells in itself the whole story of Suffolk's rise and fall. You have only to look at Dennington or a score of others to draw a parallel which needs no explaining to the most unimaginative mind. But behind the story of the churches lies another, at which I have hinted already, difficult to trace and long ago forgotten: the story of the weavers.

For hundreds of years wool and weaving were the life of Suffolk; Suffolk was almost the richest industrial county in England, and its cloths were famous all over the world. I do not think that any history of Suffolk weaving exists, or, if it does, it is only a technical study; I have always regretted this, for it would be a fascinating and romantic story, too complicated, unfortunately, to be told here. I will say no more than that weaving was an industry of great importance and influence, and that in its rise and decline it carried Suffolk forward on a wave of grand prosperity and then dragged her back again to a pool of passive stagnation.

Weaving was one of the earliest industries known to man; an eighteenth-century wit said that it came in when fig-leaves went out. At any rate, the housewives of Bury were spinning on the distaff in the twelfth century; but the state of the weaving industry was in a bad way, in Suffolk as elsewhere, when Edward III



DENNINGTON CHURCH

C de Paula  
Sadly crumbled and decayed, yet so squat and thick and strong and solid that it seems clamped down upon the earth for all time



played a master-stroke by prohibiting the export of wool—which meant that Suffolk must henceforth weave its own—and introducing in 1336 a large number of discontented Flemings to teach our craftsmen a great deal that they had not known before. The ungrateful English, while learning from them, persecuted and harassed these Flemings out of sheer jealousy; but the experiment was so successful that by 1500 England had turned the tables on Flanders itself, the real home of the industry, and had found a market in every corner of the earth. Suffolk was right in the forefront; her clothiers were the richest and her churches the largest in England. There was one Thomas Spring, for instance, of a Lavenham family of clothiers, who aroused the wonder of the country by first marrying his daughter to Aubrey de Vere, son of the Earl of Oxford, and then, when he died in 1523, leaving money for a thousand Masses and £200 for the finishing of Lavenham steeple.

The causes of the decline of the woollen trade were innumerable. Mismanagement, revival of foreign competition, internal friction and rivalry, industrial capitalism—all these combined to produce such a state of poverty and depression that early in the seventeenth century Suffolk's looms were musty and idle and its clothiers had at one time about £40,000 worth of unsaleable broad-cloth lying on their hands. In 1642 they confronted the King as he was descending from his coach at Greenwich and implored him to help them in their plight. But he, poor man, had too much on his mind to be of any real use to them.

Meanwhile, the foreigner had come to the rescue of Suffolk once more. The heavier fabrics, coloured

broad-cloths and kerseys, had faded away; in their place had sprung up a new type, introduced by the Dutch and Walloon refugees during the reign of Elizabeth. They were described as the "new draperies"—"bays, arras, says, tapestry, mohair, stamant, caravans and other outlandish commodities." Once more the county thrived, and once more the strangers were treated with the minimum of gratitude. But the success of the new draperies was not to last for very long; the East India Company, with its foreign silks and muslins, had much to do with their decline, a decline which was completed by the power-looms of Yorkshire. The new draperies followed the old to the north and to the west. Defoe, who visited Sudbury, then the capital of the Suffolk woollen industry, in 1722, found that "the number of poor was almost ready to eat up the rich."

All over the county the weaving trade dwindled away. About the middle of the nineteenth century Long Melford and Sudbury embarked upon yet another branch, the manufacture of horsehair materials, also coconut matting, silk goods and corsets. These industries in turn are now almost at a standstill, and it seems that weaving in Suffolk will soon have drifted to the end of its final phase. There is, I think, but one solitary hand-weaver left in the county: Mr. Jarvis of Lavenham. He is an excellent and exquisite craftsman; but I know he will not mind my saying that he owes some part of his long list of customers to the fact that he is looked upon in the light of a romantic survival. His family have been weavers ever since the days of the Flemings, but whether there will be anyone to succeed him I do not know.

That is a very incomplete outline of the story of Suffolk weaving. Even if I had written a dozen pages it would have been just as full of gaps; but so long as it has given some slight idea of the chart of Suffolk's fortunes, then that is all that matters.

Weaving has left us many things. Above all it has left us Lavenham, by far the most beautiful small town I have ever seen. The loveliness of this place is almost unreal; the look and spirit of it are purely mediæval, and I don't suppose that a dozen new houses have been built around the centre of the town since the height of the weavers' prosperity in the sixteenth century. Leaning backwards, leaning forwards, pink, white and yellow, houses of all shapes and sizes tumble down the hill from the church and up again to the market-place; their very disorderliness gives them reality, and yet the gap between their age and this is so great that they are likely to leave you, when first you see them, bewildered and amazed. You must adjust yourself to Lavenham, and you will find that the process is by no means easy.

If I declare that this is the finest small town in England I shall probably start a riot of criticism; but I can say without any qualms that it has two buildings which are unrivalled—the Wool Hall and the Guild Hall. The Guild Hall is six hundred years old; in one room I have counted more than fifty separate beams, in another there is a chimney-place sixteen feet wide, and in another an alcove with perfect linenfold panelling, quite ten feet high. But the most wonderful room of all is the dungeon, which has beams some two feet square; the magnificence of them was doubtless wasted on the wretched prisoners,

for the dungeon also has a number of iron chains, the remains of the thumbscrew apparatus, and grim, narrow seats recessed round the walls.

Lavenham was right in the heart of the wool country, and it is a great piece of good fortune that it has survived in all its ancient beauty. The neighbouring villages interest me most in the widely different courses they have taken. Hadleigh, for instance, has been so spoiled by shoddy development and the growth of a new town that you have to look hard for the few fine old houses which still remain. Linsley, which gave its name to an old fabric, hardly exists at all; it has one pub, a few thatched cottages, and a small plastered church with a wooden tower about the size of a hen-coop. Contrasted with these is a miniature of Lavenham—Kersey, which also gave its name to a fabric. Kersey is certainly the most photographed village in Suffolk, and it is popularly supposed to be the loveliest. I have already named my own perfect village, and I am not going to argue the merits of the two. Kersey, at any rate, is a most charming place, with over-hanging cottages and a grand timbered pub. It is built in a unique position, on either side of the little river Brett; in the dip in the middle of the village the river flows across the street, without banks or hindrance.

I do not think that there is much more I can usefully say about the decline of Suffolk. Agriculture, although in the Middle Ages it was very much displaced by wool, has been the real backbone of the county from time unknown; and when wool began to collapse and the industrial worker found himself puzzled for a job,

Suffolk went back to the land once more. Since then there has been, so far as I know, no other industry (except the fishing industry) that really mattered. To the end of its days Suffolk will be an agricultural county.

Suffolk agriculture has been chronicled by Arthur Young of Bradfield Combust in the eighteenth century and by Sir Hugh Rider Haggard in the nineteenth. Its story is neither startling nor romantic. Rather is it sad, monotonous and dreary. Agriculture has been no sort of compensation for the loss of the wool trade, for, whatever the causes may have been, farming has steadily declined. The farmer's complaint is no imaginary grievance, to be heard with a lift of the eyebrows and promptly put on one side. It is something very real and pathetic; you have only to walk a dozen miles in Suffolk to realize that. The small-holder is in a bad way; more and more of his arable fields are going down to grass; six horses have dwindled to two; the youth of the village turns up its nose at thirty-five shillings a week and sets its face towards the nearest town. In 1920 a farm in the next village to mine sold for £2500; in 1927 it sold for £1500; in 1934 it sold again for £750; and last year it fetched precisely £400. As to the farms and their buildings, most of them have hardly been touched since the day they were finished. It is nothing uncommon to find a barn with the thatch stoved in or a farm with plaster ripped off the walls in dismal patches. And yet, with all the weather and depression that have hammered at them continually during the last three or four hundred years, a few of them are still wonderfully preserved—a very few, it is true, for a really well-kept building is a surprising sight in Suffolk.

But what will strike you most about them is the fierceness of their isolation and their strength and doggedness in decay. Those are the things that will strike you most about the whole county. Not that Suffolk is in the least decayed. It is poor in purse, but in spirit it is strong, solid and persevering.

It is certainly isolated. It is supremely and unassailably isolated. The wildness of it is a most attractive hostility, which is not only its greatest charm, but its surest salvation as well. With this it has frightened off all sorts of undesirable possibilities. They will never be more than possibilities, and I shall always be able to look upon Suffolk as my own.

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